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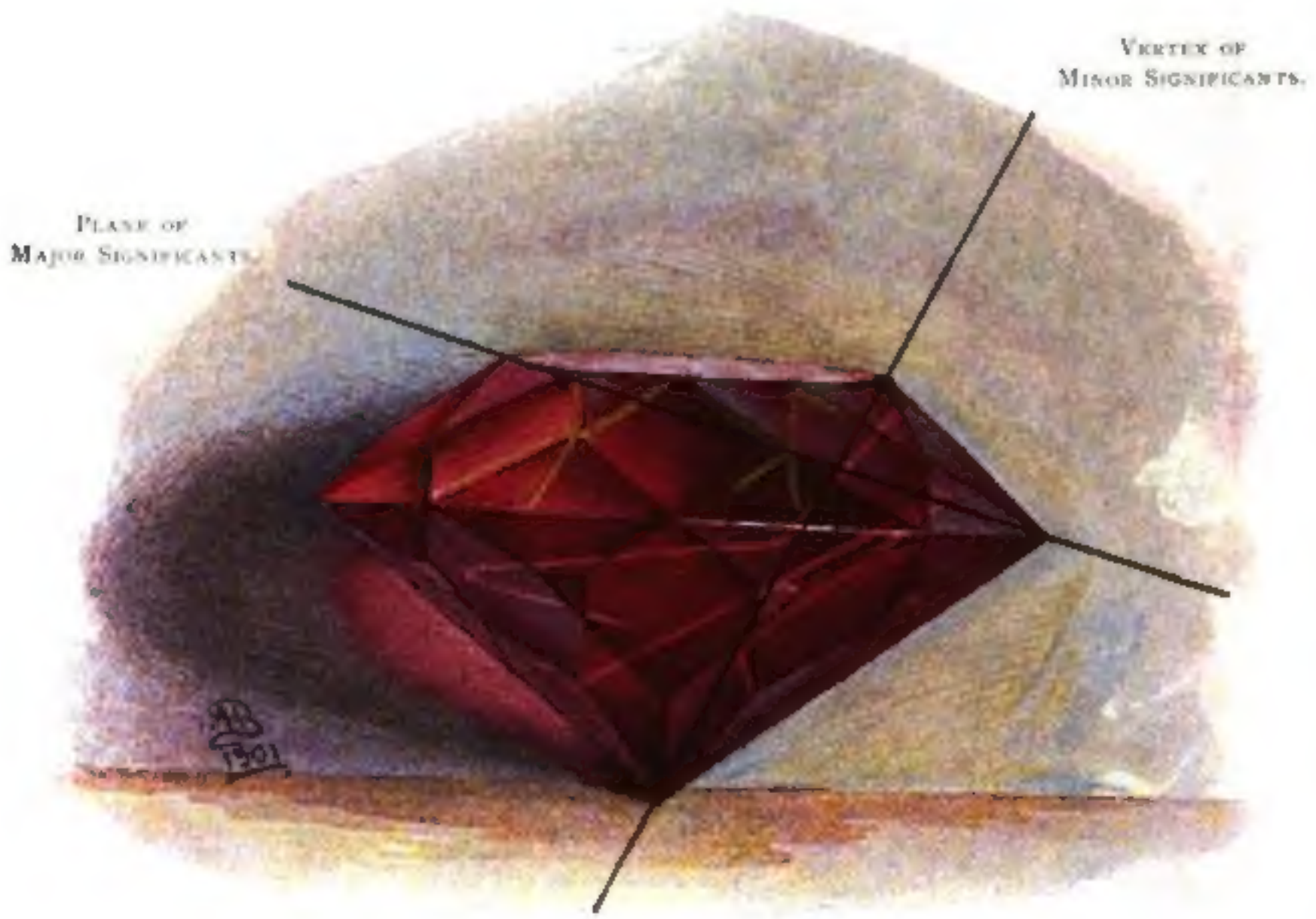
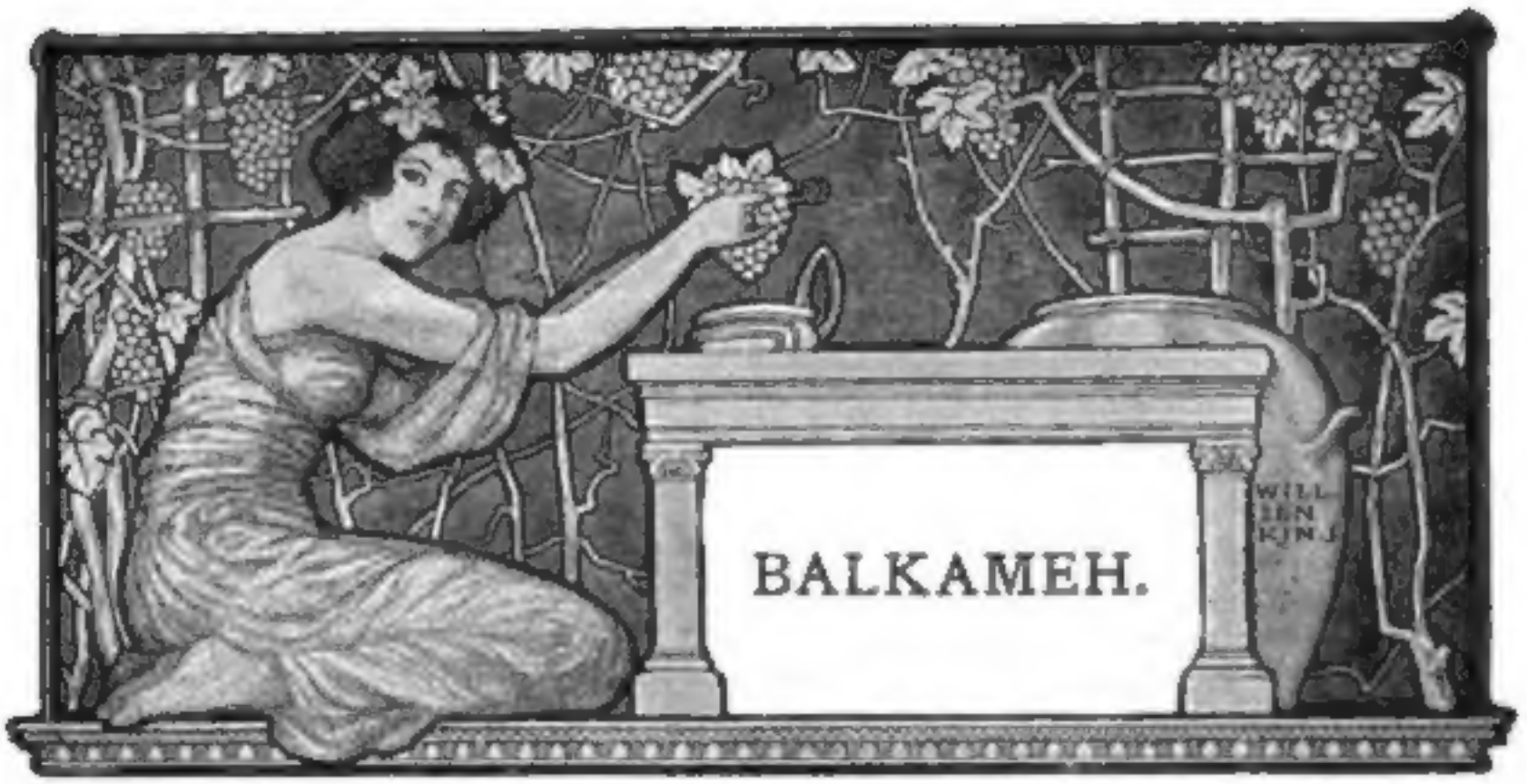


PROFESSOR VAINI'S DREAM-STONE.

THIS drawing found among Professor Vaini's papers, represents the ruby magnified to about ten times its actual size. The red lines show his calculation of the angles of refracted light within the stone. The "Southern Cross" indicated in yellow is visible only from above. The "Crest" outlined in green can be seen only at the reverse side.

"BALKAMEH"



A YEAR ago, in Paris, my attention was called to the irregular cutting of the ruby I wear as a ring. The setting had become loose, and the stone being shown to the manager of the *Maison Roque*, he examined it with a minuteness that aroused my curiosity. In answer to a question he indicated certain characteristics in the shaping and disposition of its facets which might have escaped any but the expert eye, and spoke of what he declared to be well known among master diamond-cutters—that many antique gems bear mathematically expressed in the angle and proportion and conjunction of the figures which compose their surface, a date, a name, occasionally a word of philosophical import, which, if deciphered, proves the key to some weird enigma.

"Is it possible that some such phrase exists upon the face of my ruby?" I asked incredulously.

"There are a few Asiatics," was the answer, "who to this day practise a method of writing upon jade, lapis lazuli and cornelian, whereof the outlines shaped upon this ruby seem an exceptional specimen. The fact that such geometric symbols are rarely in modern use, is no proof that they have not existed for thousands of years." Then, as though piqued by a scepticism which may have accented my query, or perhaps restrained by professional discretion, the representative of the *Maison Roque* abruptly disclaimed more than the vaguest knowledge, and busied himself with my order.

There this odd matter might have rested, had it not been that last winter at Cairo, Monsieur Mégarde, the Curator of the Ghizeh Museum, evinced so extraordinary an interest in the aspect of my ruby that, placing the ring in his hand, I remarked, "It has been thought one of the message gems that have reached us from remote ages."

He scrutinised the stone intently, and asked that it might be left for comparison with the wax impressions of all the known message gems, of which the Museum possesses a collection. He returned it the following afternoon with the announcement that a careful examination enabled him to recognise the cutting as of Phœnician workmanship. "It bears," he said, "the mystical number of seven significants. Of these, five are said to be significants in sequence, but I can only conjecture the meaning of three."

——— of Wisdom, to ———

"The first," he added, "might be King, or Chief, or Prince."

"Prince of Wisdom," I ejaculated, "is suggestive of Solomon."

Monsieur Mégarde smiled at my haste as he replied, "There are two independent emblems, the upper of which, called the crest, is clearly the equivalent of Baal, and bears a resemblance to the fifth significant, which probably is some unfamiliar name beginning or ending with the Phœnician 'bal.'"

"And what," I inquired, "is the seventh?"

"The seventh," he answered, "is that conjunction of facets, emblematic of the astronomical group we call the Southern Cross, which is considered by the half-dozen Europeans who understand the meaning of significants to be the essential characteristic of the dream-stones of antiquity."

"And what may dream-stones be?"

"Every one knows," answered the curator, "that gems exert upon certain persons an almost supernatural influence. Individuals of exceptional sensibility—poets, musicians, students of occult science, often women of imaginative faculty—are intensely moved and even inspired by holding a great jewel for an hour in the hand. A "dream-stone" does far more than kindle such emotions. It directs the thoughts of whoever has the receptive capacity along given lines, presenting a train of facts or ideas and transmitting thus through the ages, from mind to mind, a recital which is always the same, varying only as a piece of music may vary in the execution according to the skill or expression of different performers."

My interest was now as thoroughly aroused as it could be in a subject which seemed little less than absurd. I resolved, upon leaving Egypt, to visit Rome and place the ring in the hands of a lifelong friend, Professor Vaini, whose attainments as a master of occult science are universally known. He received me with the grave kindliness of old, insisted upon my sharing his vegetarian breakfast, and scrutinised my ring in silence. It seemed superfluous to make any explanation of its supposed character, so I limited my statement to the peculiarities in its cutting, upon which I begged his opinion, and, leaving the ring, returned to my hotel.

Three days later, a note from the Professor summoned me. I was startled at the change the interval had wrought in his appearance. He looked like one who has passed through a severe illness, and suddenly aged half a dozen years.

"I have done with your ring," he began abruptly. "It had been so many centuries unused as a medium of communication that its accumulated power is almost killing. The peculiarities to which you refer are significant angles, the most accurate form of inscription known to man, in the present case easily read and to be freely rendered as follows:

THIS DREAMSTONE OF LOVE
THE PRINCE OF WISDOM TO BALKAMEH,
THE BEAUTIFUL, THE GLAD TIDINGS OF BAAL.

The Professor laid his hand thoughtfully upon a roll of manuscript. "While engaged in deciphering those significants," he said, "I took the ring to the window to calculate the angle at which the light is reflected through the stone from what are called its superior facets. Its contact exercised upon me an overmastering and not altogether agreeable effect. I feel so nervous and exhausted after the experience, that I am about to leave for Subiaco for a week's repose. I believe the ruby gave me its 'glad tidings' very fully, and I have spent an entire day in writing out the impression or series of pictures which flashed through my mind. I know not if I were asleep or awake during the hour the reverie lasted."

I thanked the Professor, took leave of him and on reaching my apartment

read his manuscript twice with breathless interest. I publish it now, literally translated from his Italian, for the information of those few who know and love the curious arts. Having occupied two days of Professor Vaini's time, and obliged him to make a journey, I wrote him a day or two later in acknowledgment of his kindness, enclosing a cheque for ten thousand francs. I was inexpressibly shocked at receiving a reply from his secretary announcing the *savant's* death at Subiaco soon after his arrival. It was a case of collapse following upon interruption of the vital functions, as though, to use his words, "the brain had been struck by lightning."

Professor Vaini's Manuscript.

In the hundredth year of the Lion in Heaven, the bird Splendour of the Morning spread his wings, and mounted with tireless flight, saying to the Magicians in the realm of Sheba, "Declare ye unto the Queen that I salute her with the words, 'O Balkameh, thou art of perfect beauty.' Moreover, ye who understand the science of the seventh power, shall bid her know that the King whom soothsayers call Prince of Wisdom, and who is a refuge alike from storm and heat, awaits her." So at the voice of the bird the magicians rose to uncover their feet, and the daughters of music were silent.

At these words the Queen rejoiced, saying, "This is the messenger I have foreseen, who hath appeared in visions, who comprehends the meaning of the mystic number, who may not be caught with a net, neither fears the snare of the fowler." Wherefore she commanded that for the space of a year, through the coasts of Mariaba, provision of horses and camels be made, and gifts collected with guards and interpreters. Whereat the land of Sheba was glad, and the dreamer weaving a garland of dreams awoke, and far away a song was heard in the night, as of them going with pipes and filled with joy.

When the caravan assembled in number as the friends of one giving gifts, she whose name is Glad Tidings of Baal, who in Ethiopia is the King's daughter of the South, the glorious land, made sacrifice, having in her hand the sceptre of the powerful one, and on her finger the signet of authority, and before her the cedar-boughs which Baalim loves.

From Hebron Balkameh beheld Jerusalem, as she had wished to see it from the south, even from the direction of the land of Sheba, its yellow rock walls rising athwart the palms. Her company likewise remembered no more the burden of their journey; and at the morning light they looked across poppy-strewn wheat-fields, which make the young men cheerful, and vines that give new wine for the maids. Before them stood Zion, its crest touched as a burnished and glistening diadem, while poised upon outspread wings floated Splendour of the Morning, musing upon the secret of the presence and the dominion of the hills of dream.

Before the gate stood the King's bodyguard of six hundred lusty young men, whose delight is in arms. Whoso looks upon them—the imperturbable—silent and motionless, with short, glistening spears, thinks with compassion of such as shall come forth against them. Wherefore Balkameh smiled, saying, "I shall remember you as the radiantly calm." But when she asked that their chief officer might speak with her, their faces were troubled; nevertheless came Ahishar the singer, who being set over the household, held in his hand the backbone of a giant. When the Queen asked, "Art thou captain over these fearless ones?" he answered, "Their captain is Methusael, who is under the King's displeasure."

Then Balkameh besought that the young men might that day be feasted from

her stores, to every one a loaf of bread, a piece of flesh, even the meat of fatlings with choice bones, and a flagon of wine, and baskets of first-ripe fruits.

All Jerusalem, even to the sons of the sorcerers, came forth, and the Queen cast silverlings by the way. First came the chief musician, and a great company making melody with mirth of tabrets, after whom followed maidens, dancing with tinkling feet. Last of all in his chariot appeared Solomon, followed by the elders, the scribes, and the prophets. He was of sunburnt complexion, with full flowing brown hair and beard, touched with a golden glow, and in his vigorous stature and strong hands and ruddy face one perceived the athlete and hunter. Yet more, as whoever considers a vineyard discerns the rich bunches of grapes, so in his meditative eye one reads the poet and lover of sun-flecked woods. He leaped to earth, coming to greet Balkameh with gracious words, for his words are full of marrow, and his sayings like wine well refined. Then, raising her dark hand to his brow, he fixed his gaze upon her, murmuring, "How sweet is the hand-touch of a beautiful stranger!"

Then she answered, "O topmost branch of the tree, may my everlasting home be near thine amid the stars." And speaking with kindling eyes and brilliant face aglow she was, as Baalim is my judge, as splendid as one of the shining ships of Tarshish. Then they stood together in the chariot and drove by the brook of the willows amid the throng of people, and were saluted by the kings of the shore and the kings of the mingled nations that dwell in the desert, till skirting the city they came to the House of Ivory in the midst of the garden, called of Eden, where formerly dwelt Pharaoh's daughter, one of the King's first wives.

Here Bathsheba advanced to receive her son's visitor. Behind her followed three men, sons of Rehob, King of Zobah, whom David took and whom he made attendants upon the women, wherefore, even now in their old age, the slaves of the palace laugh them to scorn. So when Solomon had touched Balkameh's head with the ointment of joy he withdrew, and Bathsheba conducted her through a vestibule, where against the wall was fixed the yellowing skeleton of Goliah with outstretched hands, each bent for a torch; thence entering the Queen's bedroom, they seated themselves upon the cushion-strewn floor. Between the windows, near an ivory bed, stood a table of mother of pearl with water jars and flagons, and in the midst of the room a brazier, over which, on winter evenings, Pharaoh's daughter had been wont to bend her dusky body. The ceiling whereof is inlaid with the words:

"The sword for men, the lute for women, the pen for slaves."

Bathsheba's glory hath faded since David beheld her upon Uriah's roof. Fat from gross eating, wrinkled for want of love, reduced by sloth to the care of parrots—for her the rainbow lieth in the retrospect. In her age she hath returned to the gods of her youth, Berith, whose temple is at Shechem, Chemosh, and the gods of Hamath, Arphad, and Sepharvaim, and she paints her body with gaudy stripes as often as she dances before their altars in the groves.

Through an aroma of burning spice Balkameh asked, "Tell me, composer of songs, who was the man led in chains by the gate?" Whereat Bathsheba replied, "Sister, that is Methusael, captain of the body-guard, sentenced to be sawn asunder, and led thus collar-bound before his fellows that he may taste his fate to the bone."

From room to room they walked, beholding the gifts of Pharaoh, of Hiram King of Tyre, and of the lords of Cyprus, till from the roof they gazed upon pastures with bubbling springs as pure as the wells of Salvation, and marked

"Coming to greet Balkamch with gracious words."

the sunshine where the humming-birds flit, and the shade where the woodpecker taps on the tree.

The following morning came Abishag, the King's favourite wife, whom Solomon loveth as the signet upon his hand, resting not in his love but making great joy over her with voluptuous songs. Who having been brought when a girl to David's death-bed, remained in the palace when David was no more. In which days, when Solomon was ever inditing, she came to his closet, and casting aside her vestment, crept stealthily upon him, and laying a hand upon the scroll looked laughing in his eyes, whispering, "The knowledge of a woman, O Son of the Sun, is better than the wisdom of a man or than the promises of prophets." Wherefore because she was clean-limbed and magnificently poised, gave he her fair raiment with jewels of price and dream gowns curiously woven to wear at night, and dyed attire and badger-skin shoes to wear by day. She also was a lover of groves, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense upon altars, so that in high places the name of Baalim was upon her lips.

Then spake the Queen. "Tell me, Lily of speech, why heard I through the night, and in the morning when the watchmen sang at sight of the break of day, the sobbing of one that has drunk of the cup of trembling?"

Whereto Abishag answered, "Bride whom the Gods desire, it is Adalia, a Bactrian, whom the King hath set here as a nail in a sure place." And with swift gesture she added, "I will strip her out of her clothes, and after her cheek-teeth are drawn, she shall be bound to a chariot-wheel with her feet in the ground, the wheel whereof shall be turned, and her body wrenched askew."

"Why is she set as a nail in a sure place?" murmured Balkameh.

While they were served with salted locusts and stuffed fish, Abishag wiped her lips, answering, "O subtle charmer of men, be it likewise given thee to snare the dragon and the unicorn. Know that this Bactrian was to wed Methusael, the captain of the guard, who lies in a dungeon where his skin cleaveth to the bone for scorpions. And because Adalia is stiff-necked and would not bow before the wishes of the King, neither listen to the voice of the interpreter, she hath been made like a young tree in the drought."

That day, when they came into the city of David, the King met them before the Temple. Beside him was Pharaoh's daughter, of lean, implacable face, her shaven head being covered with a wig. Whose voice is cold as the splash of a bucket when it falls in the well, neither takes she heed of aught save at a prospect of war, the thought whereof rejoices her. Near by stood also Guni, the Ethiopian, who draws the bow like a man and bestrides a horse like an Arab. Her delight is to paint her body ring-streaked, and to sit watching in the fire the shapes that come and go. Likewise, she observeth times and useth enchantments, knowing both male and female night-monsters. Whose gods are Misroch, god of the Assyrians, Dagon the fish god, and Milcom whom the Hebrews call the abomination of Moab; but the greatest of all she declares to be Moloch. So the virgins that came with Pharaoh's daughter snuffed at Guni because her hair curls crisp, and Bathsheba sprinkled her, whereat Guni was wroth and hissed.

Balkameh beheld Millo, the house called the forest of Lebanon, the holy house and the sanctuary of strength, over which silver lay like dust. She saw also Solomon's wives, of whom not one hath her deep-set eyes and clear-cut face, and her bosom veiled with a veil. They passed before the molten sea and the flowers of lilies, till, beholding the burnt-offerings, the Queen gave to the priests a silver spit whereon to roast an ox. Likewise cast she into the chest wherein are cast the trespass money and the sin money which are the priests'.

And seeing the throng of prophets watching the great pot filled with seethe-pottage, she scattered drops of ointment upon the throne, breathing in silence a prayer to Baal, that her heart's desire be granted. Where also in the place of presentation of gifts she offered to Solomon gifts of Ophir gold, and they passed together into the inner court where is no noise, nor strident word, nor lamentation, but only a twittering of birds, like a voice of mirthful gladness, as it were the voice of the bridegroom and the bride.

But one of the prophets that watched the heaping-up of treasure, lifted his hands, saying: "The house that ye fill shall become an habitation of beasts, and the kings of Judæa shall be as wandering birds cast out of the nest. Verily Millo shall be full of doleful creatures, and in the Gate Beautiful shall satyrs dance. And as for the queens of the ends of the earth, that pray to winged spirits that their hearts' desire be granted, they shall be drunk with the sweet wine and strange water forbidden to prophets."

Then answered Solomon, his face red with wrath, "Shall a Prophet live for ever, and doth not Scripture declare that a presumptuous Prophet shall die? Thou art no better than one that would plunder the tomb of a king. Of a truth I will roll thee in the dust, making thee a gazing-stock, and a hook shall be put in thy nose and thou shalt be wiped as a serving-man wipeth a dish, turning it upside down."

Now this Prophet is the brother of Methusael.

So Balkameh returned to the House of Ivory to bathe in a cool tank in the midst of the garden of Eden. Here, in bygone days, in the midst of the seclusion she loved, came Pharaoh's daughter to listen to the musical inspiration of fountains by day, and read the message of the stars at night. Amid orange blossoms and wine-red oleanders, the trickling water touches the air with its whisper. Beneath clustering cypresses is a rock, where at noontide the sunshine spreads the moss with brilliance. A trellised way, heaped with roses, leads to the summer-house within whose roof is painted the Zodiac. Near by, for a jest, Pharaoh's daughter caused to be graven by her Egyptian graver on a fragment of wall little seen, the figure of Rameses holding the Hebrews in bondage by the hair of their head. Before whom also she set an image of Hathor, the giver of joy, with hands overflowing with amaranths, that when goddesses and kings' daughters meet, her hands may still be filled with the bloom of immortal days.

When Sheba went to salute the Prince of Wisdom in his house, they left the multitude in the court and ascended to the roof, whence the eye ranges to the almond grove by the pool of Siloam, where the daughters of pleasure dance. And Solomon laughed, saying: "Are not the side-lights often the happiest views?—from here David beheld Bathsheba!"

But she murmured, "Who can guess how far my fancy may stray, though I but walk to the nearest village? And because Baal hath granted me a corner-stone of knowledge have I learned to keep close to the simple things of life, be they no profounder than the reflection of a star."

As she spoke, she started away from the wall, stumbling over a basket of scrolls which was the King's business for the day; for fluttering before her in the breeze hung the skin of a man of stature, slain by David's son Jonathan, who in life had on each hand six fingers and on each foot six toes. Nevertheless the King bade her be seated, saying: "Let us dedicate an hour to calm," pointing as he spoke to the sky where, weaving its circling flight, floated the Hoopoo of the crimson wings, which dwells at the foot of the rainbow.

Then Balkameh blushed, for she is one to whom Splendour of the Morning hath spoken, saying: "For thee an adorable lover lingers in the darkness, in the depth of the garden, standing motionless and expectant as a phantom of the night!"

Her gaze rested upon a sundial, a figure of bronze with uplifted hands, the hand of Time and the hand of Destiny, the shadows whereof mark the lapse of day. Which was made by a Phœnician in the youthful semblance of Abishag when she cast aside her vestment to stand before the King. But Balkameh was jealous, because Abishag is beautiful, wherefore as Solomon turned aside she spat in the figure's face.

Then the King, seating himself near her, said: "I too love simple facts, nor am I content till I have tried to sound them as it were with line and plummet, even were they unfathomable as a ripple of the sea."

To which the Queen answered, "How shall we fare with our handcuffed hands and blinded eyes, if the wine of life become mixed with bitter water? Is anything really old, or wholly new?"

Whereat Solomon laughed, saying, "There are things which be old, yet always new—the lore of Egypt, which takes note of the flight of a bird; or where the river is deep knows what lies beneath the wave; or that enchanted circle, older than the Pyramids, at which wizards peep and mutter, wherein the earliest Pharaohs read the wisdom of superb repose."

After they had discoursed of many things, Balkameh asked, "Is a king a breeder of nettles in the way of a friend that seeketh a gift, or shall the door of hope be closed upon one whose heart is breaking?"

Then Solomon replied: "In every palace there be thieves waiting to penetrate the gold-worker's chamber. Nevertheless, say on."

The Queen continued: "There is a damsel called Adalia, to whom, if leave be granted, I will speak a word in season, bidding her hearken with her ears, that she may live and not die; and to me, if to none other, will she hearken, for her god is Baal-zebab. But first she and Methusael shall be set free to dwell at the House of Ivory, subject to my command."

Whereto the King answered: "O voice persuasive as the murmuring deep, be it done according to thy desire."

On the following day when they sat at meat, loaves and cracknels were set before them, and antelope collops roasted upon coals, with quails, partridges, and fowls of the air. Likewise, to each table an osier basket heaped with grapes and lumps of figs and strings of pomegranates, and a cruse of honey fresh from the comb. Then Solomon said: "Shall not the house give gifts to its lord? Call therefore the chief musician, that we may drink wine with a song."

So it was a day of feasting with laughter and clapping of hands. When the cupbearer had tasted, they drank to the lees, and no man's cup was empty, neither were the wine-cups suffered to stand full. The chief musician also drew from his dulcimer a haunting melody so deftly touched that each reverberant string gave back the meaning of his spoken word as he told of the enchanted groves where the singing of unseen damsels is heard, even of them that sing for joy of heart when kings come to glory in the sun's rising. Whereat Balkameh looked towards the King with a yellow light kindling her black eyes; but Bathsheba sat cold and silent, raking over the ashes of her youth.

Of a sudden the King cried, "Bring hither Adalia." Then, when she was set

"She was the type of that race of dancers and musicians for whom the stars delight to shine."

in their midst, he said: "Is not new wine found in the clustre, and shall she not dance?"

But Adaha answered, "Great King, they that descend into the pit cannot hope for truth; must I therefore go all my years in the bitterness of my soul?"

Yet, though her words were soft, one could read in her blanched face that her heart was as adamant. Nevertheless, her head was faint, and her eyes overflowing with anguish. Then, forasmuch as she would not dance, the young men took her away, mocking, to thrust her head downward in a wine-butt.

Now Sheba whispered to the King: "Are lilies gathered with a scythe, or do men make love with an axe? Surely a maiden will not confess before this throng, but to me hath she hearkened with her ears. By Lucifer, she is more pleasant than a garden of cucumbers. She but feared a king's love might pass as the early dew. This night, in the Garden of Eden, when stars climb in the sky, she shall wait in the dark, in the midst of the clustre of palms, and by her tinkling silver bells and the balsam with which she anoints herself shall she be known."

The King drank till he beheld the hollow of his golden cup ere, smiling, he said: "Who wants a grander tent than the dome of the starlit sky?" And after a thoughtful pause he added, "Hath not the Hoopoo said, *The wise man findeth his love in the dark*"? Moreover, of his choicest treasure, even of the uncut gems that he wore, gave he Balkameh a ruby which had never been graved by the graver's tool, saying as a demon laughed and murmured in his ear—"Take this red drop of my blood for a token that thou shalt have thy heart's desire."

Then Sheba rose, and having cast aside her dream-gown of embroidered linen, stood before him, glistening in the torchlight, as one about to dance before the altar. And her waving hands and quivering finger-tips were like hovering butterflies. So as she danced barefoot up and down the alabaster pavement, her splendid body fine as the dash of spray that leaps where the salt wave strikes, they that looked were hushed, save for the sackbuts that filled the air with piping like the thrill of nightingales at night, till the soul of the listener whispered within him. And the Queen was as a proud standard bearer that fainteth not, neither is trodden down. She seemed also an incarnation of the voluptuous South—a sinuous, pearl-girdled semblance of its suave and stately palms—a vision of tropic birds and fleet-winged sails touched by an after-sunset glow. More than all, she was the type of that race of dancers and musicians for whom the stars delight to shine. Whoso beheld her knew that this is the breeze-blown dance wherein the maidens of Babylon exult in the groves of betrothal, as the dance of them that prepare for the nuptials they desire. Wherefore in her swaying Balkameh interpreted the mystical meaning of the amorous shafts with which at his rising and setting the Sun-god pierces the depth of his groves; or the reflection, as of gems bestowed by a lover, which at Tyre he lifts from the sea upon the sun browned wall of his house.

When the Queen, having made an end, put on again her dream-gown, a silence fell, like the hush that follows when the rhythm and emotion of prayer moisten the eyes. Till, as though touched by the hand of a listening god, a harpstring broke, whereby as she took her leave and the air resounded with the acclaim of many voices, we knew that a fateful instant had passed. So Sheba returned to the Ivory House, in whose garden the King that night waited and watched, silent as break of day, while stars climbed in the sky, till in the midst of the clustre of palms he became aware that a woman stood in the darkness, and by the tinkling silver bells and the fragrance of oleander balsam he knew that it was Adaha.

When the days of the Queen's sojourn were fulfilled, she stood with her company before the King at the oak of weeping. And she interrupted the long salutation of the prophets, and, turning to the Pearl of Wisdom, said, "Let our farewell be brief. When lengthening shadows slant through the Garden of Eden—forget not Adaha. In the deepest copse of Manaba, in the midst of overleaning palms, will I build a Bower of Remembrance, where on starlit evenings, after

"Farewell. But to me all the days of my life, whatever I see that is beautiful shall speak to me with thy voice."

good-night or at break of day, before the bidding of good-morning the footsteps of thrilling memories shall rustle the leaves. Are there not things best understood in the darkness, and hath not the Hoopoo declared, *A woman shall compass a man?* Verily a woman's wit is no ill match for Solomon's wisdom. There be three wonderful riddles the flight of a bird in the air, the course of a ship in the sea, and the way of a man with a maid Now this was the way of a queen with a king—and this also, my adorable lover, thou comprehendest not Farewell.

But to me, all the days of my life, whatever I see that is beautiful shall speak to me with thy voice. Yea, hereafter shall I care little for the blended meaning of the stars, if but a single point of radiance beckons me to thee."

The long caravan wound down the hills, till looking back, Balkameh beheld the Temple sparkling in the sunset as a flame of triumph.

Then went the King into an high place, and with him were Jehosaphat, the recorder, and Benaiah, chief of the host. Thence his eyes followed the caravan till through the pink haze it faded and was lost in violet darks. But they that were near understood not why he laughed, murmuring: "to think I knew not! As though one could take from a woman her heart's delight, mocking her borrowed balsam and her ankles bound with another's silver bells! Is not a tiger-lily more splendid than an amaranth—albeit both be fair? The wise man is he who knows enough not to know too much, and this, subtle maker of riddles, is the way of a King with a Queen."

It was an afternoon when mere consciousness of life brought perfect peace. Time's tender touch mellowed the battlements with russet that flushed or darkened between sunshine and shade. Sweet scent of perfumed gardens bore pulses that thrilled like a thought of fair women. The mountains veiled with opalescent hues the secret of their solitude sublime. Beyond them a cloud caught the fugitive sparkle of day, seeming a last fading glimpse of the bird that for ever had flown —the splendour and joy of the morning. But to this hour no man can tell aught of Methusael or Adalia, nor into what land they went when they fled from the House of Ivory.

This singular narrative speaks with a precision in marked contrast to the looseness and verbiage of Oriental recitals, whether ancient or modern. Its statements are not at variance with historical fact, so far as known. Had it been deciphered from a papyrus, its intimate details would suggest that it might have been written by one in attendance upon the Queen. It alludes to Balkameh as still living, and to the events it records as having recently transpired. It is noticeable that at that remote period the things of Egypt were a measure of antiquity. The reference to the Temple as an edifice just completed points approximately to the year 985 B.C. Curious to remark, there are in it several slight inaccuracies such as a transient visitor, unfamiliar with the country, might make. Far more startling is the extraordinary intimation that Abishag was Solomon's first and favourite wife, and that the amorous phrases of his Song are an impassioned memorial of their love.

Professor Vaini's manuscript led me to the study of Phœnician civilisation and enterprise. In Solomon's time the South Arabian kingdom of Saba or Sabæa, or Sheba, now known as Arabia Felix, controlled the East African coast, and its colonists had not only occupied Abyssinia, but had penetrated as far as the gold mines of Mashona. The Somali district was known to ancient Egypt as the Land of Punt. Portuguese explorers of the Massapa mines note the resemblance between the native name "Afur" and the Biblical "Ophir." It was from here that Balkameh obtained her gold, of which, if the Jewish gold talent is rightly calculated at £5475, her gift to Solomon must have amounted to over £600,000. The language and writing of Abyssinia indicate that it was peopled from South Arabia at a period of remote antiquity. Following upon this trace, the French

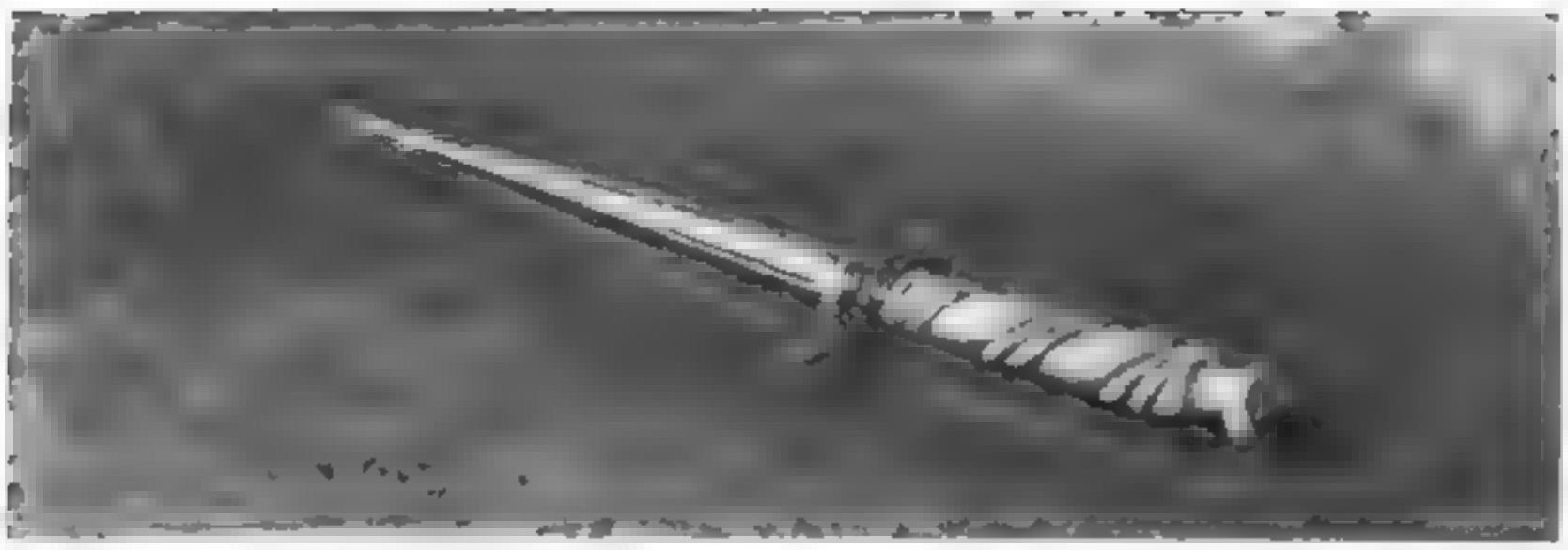
explorer Arnaud discovered towards the middle of the nineteenth century the ruined walls and Temple of Marraba, the royal city of Sheba, and obtained inscriptions of Phœnician derivation.

An element of uncertainty will always attach to the Abyssinian tradition that the Royal family of that kingdom, whereof Menelik is the present representative, descends from a son of the Queen of Sheba. I have asked the opinion of Egyptologists, of Oriental scholars, and of eminent churchmen as to the existence of this child, and while the consensus of opinion rests upon inferential conclusions, there is in the surmise which attributes its paternity to Solomon nothing conflicting with our knowledge of the Prince of Wisdom.

I have frequently sought the confidence of the dream-stone by holding it for hours in meditative silence, but necessarily in vain. It is obviously unlikely that an unimaginative man of affairs could attune himself to mysteries so subtle and elusive. More than once I have invited a repetition of Professor Vaini's observations by offering to submit my ruby to the experiments of acquaintances whose sensitive mood might render them receptive subjects. On such occasions it has seemed an evident duty to mention the tragic fate of my Italian friend, to whom the "glad tidings of Baal" were as lightning. Then, to my chagrin, the listener's flashing interest invariably fades, and the dream-stone of Balkameh's love, which her lips may have touched and inspired—remains silent.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

"The young men took her away, mocking, to thrust her head downward in a wine-butt."



A SECRET OF OLYMPUS.

I.

DURING the past few years I have been several times questioned as to the circumstances of my acquaintance with Professor Vann, whose tragic end was described in a previous number of this Magazine. Till now I have hesitated to speak of events with which I was associated, through regard for the susceptibility of those whom they chiefly concerned. But now that all save I have passed away, there seems no indiscretion in making known Vann's remarkable discovery, whereof he was wont to say that it had once been given him to tread very near the footsteps of the gods.

In venturing back into the sunshine of my youthful days, let me begin by saying that a search for the keys which unlock doors in antiquity has been, through many years, the fascinating occupation of my leisure hours. Had I the art to weave a love-story, the slender outline of this narrative might be graced and enlivened. But with a view to reach the most accurate record of things which happened thirty-five years ago, I am about to dictate my recollection of them to a typewriter, without pause or interruption.

At Rome, in the month of November 1869, I was received as a student by Professor Vann, and spent a couple of hours daily with him in his rooms at the Trinità dei Monti. When I first knew him, Vann was forty-five years old: a handsome man, of graceful manner, which rarely passed beyond a formal courtesy. He possessed wide literary knowledge, and had devoted a dozen years to the study of scientific subjects in their occult bearing upon modern humanity. In those days whoever entered the Papal dominion passed within the repose and remoteness of a bygone century. From out its monk's hood the mediæval face of Popish Rome looked forth grey and indomitable. In intellectual bias my instructor was nowise at variance with the pagan shadowland of his surroundings. He had an unexpressed, albeit conscious, disdain for modern ways, though I came to know him as one who sought the latest discovered altitudes of critical research. He wrote and spoke French, German, and Spanish, and had translated the Arabic writings upon transmigration of Ormès and Almodoro. As an experimental chemist he discovered the composition of the inimitable poison of the Borgias. However softly he spoke, he underlined his thought, and I have never known a man who so intuitively divined a mystical significance. His talk was subtle and illuminative, and the range and variety of his reading gave his mind a brilliant insight. He

seemed continually conscious of that elusive world which is beyond our commonplace futility.

I was first attracted to Professor Vaini by reading of his experiments in suspended animation, wherein, having buried a man alive in the crypt of Santa Bibiena, he brought him forth after ten days, like Lazarus—a demonstration of fasting which in later years has frequently been surpassed. He was deeply read in the language and lore of the Greeks and Romans, and I soon perceived that the Olympians were more to him than abstract impersonations. He affirmed that the principle of divine life entering into a human body exists in the tradition of all ages, and that there is nothing more incredible in the Labours of Hercules than in the Plagues of Egypt; that the stories of the Ark and of the Argonauts are equally true, and that Aphrodite risen from foam is not more improbable than Lot's wife turned to salt.

It is an obvious fact that the results derived from our study in the equations of life are dependent upon the mood in which that study has been approached. With me the mood was one of rare delight in progressive analyses, and my eagerness unluckily aroused the Professor's displeasure. I mentioned one morning an observation made by me at Pompeii and confirmed at the Museum of Ghizeh, which, as the reader will see later on, was connected with a discovery upon which Vaini prided himself, and which to this day is known to few. It was largely for the purpose of obtaining his estimate of the occult arts that I had become his pupil. The circumstance which a year before had attracted my attention was that upon many mummy-cases, as well as within a few Greek painted tombs and on several Pompeian walls, there exist eccentric combinations and repetitions of colour, which, however seemingly careless, are seen upon closer scrutiny to have been deliberately designed. The famous pediment at the Temple of Isis was thus curiously bordered, and the same suggestion is apparent in the colouring of early Greek pottery. My observation had resolved itself into the theory that to the classic mind the harmonies of colour held no less significant inspiration than the accords of music.

One morning when we were seated in the Professor's study, he as usual at his big table strewn with a literary medley, an explanation of the method whereby we trace conceptions to and fro across the intellectual horizon presented the awaited opportunity.

"I am convinced," I said, following his thought, "that the drapery of at least four Pompeian figures tells a story that is but half hidden on the line of our horizon."

The Professor leaned back in his cane chair, and fixing his eyes upon the cabinet of minerals opposite, murmured in a subdued and altered voice, "What an odd idea!"

"It is not idle fancy," I replied. "You cannot have failed to observe in the decorations of Pompeii half-concealed fragments which are without relation to the more brilliant hues. If you have examined the so-called *tomb of the garlands*, at the Herculanean gate, you will have been struck by the unnatural colouring of the flowers."

"Chemical change of centuries," muttered the Professor.

"Moreover," added I, piqued at his indifference, "there is near the gate of Nola a vividly painted tablet with the inscription 'CESSIT COMMUNI PROPRIUM,' at a place where the public right ceased. Now, within the Nolan gate, at a closed street, is the same tablet, with identical colouring, but without the words. Herein, then, is revealed that to the classic mind a connection existed between

thought and colour. That an idea may be figured in colour is not new, for it is as natural and obvious as that certain mental conditions are expressed by sound. As Sappho asks, '*What better than a birdsong tells the meaning of sunrise?*' Or what Greek, looking upon the sea and watching its purple brighten to emerald in the shallows, could fail to divine its meaning?"

"And that meaning was?" ejaculated the Professor.

"That life, as well as Nature, has its harmonies."

To my astonishment, Vaini rose with angry irritation, and I have often wondered what was to follow. Before he could utter a word the door opened, and Facino, his boy-of-all work, hastily entered, with a visitor's card pencil-marked *Urgentissimo.* My instructor abruptly withdrew to an adjoining room, where he remained such a long half-hour that I took my departure,—and felt profoundly relieved the following day when, on resuming our studies, no reference was made to my indiscretion.

A fortnight later, remaining one rainy day to lunch, I met my associate pupil, Orion Marblehead, of Massachusetts, a young man three years older than myself. He had spent several winters in Rome, and larded his observations upon the Eternal City with expressive Americanisms. He was given to theorising upon things ancient and modern, had much natural curiosity, and worshipped success. He had a strong, clear-cut face, was a superior chess-player, and possessed boundless self-confidence, which he manifested in the frequent exclamation, "Hell couldn't catch me if I had an hour's start." We had made an end of the exquisitely dressed lobster salad, which, with biscuits and cheese, was the sole refection our vegetarian tutor placed upon the table, and were sipping black coffee served by Bonifacino, or "Facino," when the Professor was again summoned by Monsignor Beltà's coadjutor to call upon him at his office. Mr. Marblehead and I lingered, and he told me of our instructor's villa overlooking the Lake of Nemi, where Madonna Cesarano—an old bourgeoise, widow of a brigand of blessed memory and mother of Facino and of a daughter named Hebe—kept house. This rural habitation, which was Vaini's refuge in summer, was referred to as Villa Cesarano, or by its more poetic appellation, Rocca di Falco.

"When I first went on a visit to Rocca," said Mr. Marblehead, hilariously terminating his description of the Cesarano family, "I made the widow a present of a flagon of Demerara rum, at which her face flushed with pleasure till I mistook it for sunset She replenishes that flask with a half-and-half mixture of Vermouth and Cognac; and you can tell when the bottle is getting empty, because the old lady's snap oozes away in proportion. She will tell you about papa Cesarano, who used to clean the knives on her—as often as he was out of gaol."

My companion's frankness and piquant conversation moved me to hazard a question relative to the studies he was pursuing.

"On my twentieth birthday," he answered, lighting a *cigaro shello*, "I resolved to taste neither meat nor drink till I had solved the central problem. I had previously constructed a method of traversing the whole sphere of human thought and examining its crannies and recesses. I had a craving for severe and simple principles, and having pledged myself to touch the highest point, my first resolve was to throw overboard all save knowledge undefiled. I had read Vaini's essay on the New Renaissance, and entered with enthusiasm upon his experiment of a substitution of classic for modern ideals. I said to him, 'I am all for the new, but a new which begins by returning to the old.' Before you have travelled far with the Professor you will find that he has an astounding disregard of probabilities.

When I first listened to him I wondered that a man of such keen intellect should deliberately choose to spend his life in a labyrinth. But I soon learned that he has a pill for every earthquake, and is no more wide of the mark than a gilt-edged prophet is likely to be."

"Who is Monsignor Beltà?"

"That is one of our mysteries, one that Vaini never speaks of and that I know little about. Our studies are not orthodox, and a hundred years ago the Holy Inquisition would have lodged us in St. Angelo. Now, hesitating to run us in, it has half a mind to run us out of the country. Then there are queer stories about Madonna Cesarano's daughter, Hebe, and her young man the Dogger. I suppose they include me, but bless you! give me an hour's start and Hell won't catch me!"

"As she looked towards me with hand-shadowed eyes."

Orion was seated with his back to the door, and while he spoke that door opened softly, and a young girl looked composedly in upon us, fixing the wistful splendour of her eyes upon me—the stranger. Her face was of the classic type met with among Roman women; and so noiseless had been her approach, so velvet-shod her foot, that the instant's presentment of her tranquil beauty might have seemed less an actual presence than some fleeting ideal of one whom the Immortals loved. Then she drew back and the door closed. Mr. Marblehead noticed my momentary abstraction and glanced sharply back.

"A statuesque girl," I explained, "or rather that sense of romantic divination which haunts all Rome."

"A girl!" he ejaculated; then with an air of indifference added, "That's Hebe."

Half an hour passed, Orion went his way, and the Professor did not return. I stepped forth upon the terrace, where oleanders grew, and whence one looked across a multitude of domes and façades and pinnacles—a patchwork of roofs and balconies, of chimneys and cupolas and belfries; of mighty ruined fragments—over

all which the Roman sunshine spread its blazing splendour. But at that moment I gave small heed to ancient Rome, for there before me, a watering-can in her hand, was the girl who had gazed upon me through the half-open door.

As she looked towards me now with hand-shadowed eyes, the divine delight in life leaped in her face—the same spontaneous gladness that sets the birds singing in springtime . . . at the season of blossoms and love.

"Good morning," I said. "You are the Professor's Castellana, and I am his new pupil."

For an Italian girl her voice was singularly musical, and in that first brief meeting I was conscious that something in her nature, some subtle and mystical charm, made her separate and apart. Beneath that youthful calm what chords might vibrate, as yet but half attuned?

"You come each day," I said at parting, "to sprinkle the oleanders. Some morning I will pass again, to lean at ease and mark where poplars cast their slender lengthening shadow and listen with you to faint echoes of bygone days."

Her dark eyes looked golden in the noonday, like yellow catseyes, and as she smiled her teeth showed white as fresh-cut ivory. Yet across her face floated a swift tinge of tragic passion—as unfathomable as the depth that lurks between the rose leaves. "Signorino, come when you please," she answered simply: "I know you already . . the Professor has told me of you. We shall not be too busy to listen, nor too dull to hear."

II.

Week after week, through the silent December, my studies pursued their fascinating course. To fit my sightless eyes to the focus and perspective of those ancient times I was eager to explore, we entered upon an examination of that classic literature which is woven through Italian history. Vaini instructed me minutely in the mystical life of renowned men and women, teaching me to express concisely the outline of heroic careers, in the delineation of which, according to geometric rule, I became an adept. It grew clear to me that every situation in life may be depicted in a mathematical form, and that the development of this principle might be made to give the perfect semblance of individual character. Herein the Professor's faultless touch could indicate that unknown quantity which in every problem turns upon pure accident—a quantity Fate's caprice often delivers against us with tremendous effect, or rarely—when all other hope has failed turns with forceful sarcasm in our favour. Leaving our demonstration of heroic ideals, I passed to the study of the Professor's method as applied to Natural phenomena.

One morning on arriving at Vaini's lodging I found in his study the girl Hebe Cesarano, dusting books and tidying the writing-table. I had twice spoken with her since our first meeting; and now—pausing in her occupation, and standing against the background of veiled shadows—she began by informing me that my instructor was absent for the day.

"Gone to Rocca di Falco?" I queried. "He must need relaxation from his lurid chaos of thought. Even I begin to long for a glimpse of cornfields and the river, the smell of wild hyacinths, and a tint of reddening boughs."

"He is not there to-day," she answered; then, talking with suave Italian light and shade, she vaguely mentioned an importunate visitor.

I crossed the room, and looking in her face was startled at its pallor. "Who is this visitor?" I asked.

"Signorino, the name of Monsignor Beltà is unfamiliar to you; but it is as well known to Romans as the Holy Office itself. The ideal which the Church does not like is a crime. Whether the Monsignore aims at the Professor, or at Signor Orion, or at you or me, or at all,—who can say?"

"But what has the Holy Office to do with any of us?"

"You may well ask. It is like wondering what things exist beyond the horizon. In ancient days all roads led to Rome; in mediæval centuries, between cursings and indulgences, they led to Paradise. Who dare say whither they lead now, if not to a convent for women and the Inquisition for men!"

I listened to her words with curious interest, puzzled to think what secret lurked within the span of this young life—a secret not so unfathomable but that Vaini had taken its depth.

My hesitation provoked her to speak the warning whose suggestion I had passed by.

"If you will accept advice," she ejaculated, "leave these musty riddles that are beyond the guessing of a youth, and go. Leave Rome. Craving after vast things makes people small; the Immortals were content to seem no more and no less than themselves."

In those dangerous days I was twenty-two, and no wiser than my age Hebe was eighteen, and it stung me to be lectured as a boy.

"Speaking of leaving," I ungraciously interrupted, "Signor Orion tells me you abruptly left the convent where you had been placed."

"Dio di mi Alma!" she exclaimed, with a careless laugh, "it was because one morning I wrote SACRAE DIANAE under a saintly image. Those words ring in my ears—like birds that sing although the day is dead."

"What can those words be to you?"

"The illustrissimo Professor tried to make me remember—an experiment that lasted months."

"What were you to remember?"

"Sacrae Dianae, of course, and her temple that used to be in the gardens at the foot of modern Nemi. He will show you its foundations, but I recall its marble colonnade, its statues and altars, even its processions though, alas, the strings we touched are silent now."

"Hebe," I cried, "this splitting of ancient straws in our human tragedy has made you mad. What can you mean? What was Vaini's experiment?"

"He bade me fix my eyes upon yonder picture of the Grecian Hebe soaring towards Olympus, and after long waiting questioned me, as though to measure life's come and go across the light and shade of places known in happier days."

"In happier days!"

"Yes: days when men and women lived near to the Immortals, who anointed them with genius and loved them as equals. When endowments made for eternity were not short-lived; when children were not born with the instinct consciousness that life must die; when the brilliants had not yet turned to glass."

Her eyes moistened as she spoke; and in asking myself what could be the life of one so singularly gifted and so strangely ill starred, I became absorbed in my musing, till, presently turning to question further about the colonnades and altars and silent strings, I discovered that she had left the room unnoticed.

At Christmas Professor Vaini invited his two pupils to spend a day at Rocca di Falco. Orion Marblehead proposed that I should lunch at his lodgings and thence drive with him to the villa. Our luncheon was a substantial dinner of

beef, montepulciano and macaroni, for our instructor had not converted either of us to a vegetarian diet.

"If you wish deeply crusted ideas," Mr. Marblehead remarked as we seated ourselves, "you should dine well and drink good wine."

I asked my companion if amid the originality of our studies he ever regretted what had been left behind.

"What did I leave?" he ejaculated: "modern academic shows, a sick self-consciousness of nerves, and a high-pressure race for wealth."

I turned our conversation to the girl, Hebe Cesarano, and it was with surprise and displeasure that I listened to his careless declaration of a purpose to take her from Rome in July upon the completion of his studies.

"No carrying on the war without animals of that description," he explained; "and I consider Hebe a very produceable young woman,—she has a forearm of remarkable heft, and I once saw her run up Monte Cavo without turning a hair. She has been living rather on the loose, and somewhere in the background there is a man she is pledged to marry. His name is Gardullo Mangicane, and he is a Dogger. I intend to take her away, because she is lost in her present surroundings—not to mention that the Inquisition puts women into convents for less cause than she has given. Marry her? Oh yes, with mutual option of separation, of course. The fact is, a wife is awkward: she dives under when wanted, and comes to the surface when you wish her away. Marriage is no longer up to date; however, I have my points from start to finish, and when I want a thing I get there."

Half an hour later we were seated in an old-fashioned vettura, he smoking his favourite *cigaro shelto*, and I thinking of Hebe and of the things the future was ripening. The Campagna lay in the drowse of a mid-winter afternoon, that seemed the long-drawn calm of centuries. Upon the horizon was the lustrous line of the sea. At that hour, when shadows are longest, the sunset laid a coralline flush upon the Apennines, that faded to pale violet-blue. Till suddenly the twilight gathered, and behind us through the darkness gleamed the lights of Rome.

At the other side of Genzano we drew up near a house where Vaini welcomed us, and where presently Madonna Cesarano spread a supper of trout and eggs. And Hebe was there, and her fifteen year-old brother Facino, who, with a maid-of-all-work, Madonna designated *la famiglia*.

I was down betimes next morning, summoned by Facino to coffee and rolls. Madonna had long been astir, and greeted me with a smile. She was glad I had slept well; she herself had slept badly—something was on her mind: she had no patience with people who did not pay their debts, and she owed a scudo for refilling the flask Signor Orion had given her—I probably had not a scudo to spare—oh, *mille grazie!* Thus for the first time I saw Madonna's favourite play—throwing flowers to herself, as the Italians call it—the frequent compliment, the occasional scudo.

Here in summer Vaini lived, in scholarly retirement, embroidering upon old models. It was a quaint house, its pavement smoothed by tread of long-departed feet. A dining-room, ante-camera and the Professor's study occupied the ground floor, and half a dozen bedrooms were above. Its materials bore token of having been previously adapted to some other building, carved marble fragments being mortared in with untrimmed blocks. It had pillars that wore a monastic appearance, as of some cloister vineyard, and a battered sarcophagus received the water of a tiny stream that overflowed with ceaseless trickling splash. From tiled

roof to garden gate, Time had stained and mellowed its walls to rusty orange-red, giving it thus the benediction of that graceful age which marks Italian houses.

Coffee disposed of, the Professor and Orion went botanising on Monte Cavo, whilst I remained to study botany with Hebe in her wild-rose garden. As we strolled forth down the hillside, I beheld for the first time the Lake of Nemi, the *Speculum Dianae*, on whose placid surface, as the morning wore on, the silvery aquamarine deepened to amethyst. About it hung a melancholy charm, a sense of mystery and isolation, which not even the brilliant sunshine could dispel. Opposite rose the battlemented village of Nemi, as rugged as the rock-piled monasteries and towered castles of the Abruzzi. Behind were cliffs now faintly purpling with profusion of wild anemones, on whose scarred face one reads the silent yet eloquent story of heroic idylls,—archaic sunrise, Roman day, and mediæval twilight.

"In such a scene," I cried, turning to Hebe, "who does not envy the antique life spent wholly out of doors?"

Beside us, as we strayed, the russet lichen shone fine as velvet, and I took Hebe's hand in mine and made her feel its softness. How beautifully she held herself, and with what charming grace she listened, and how exquisite the Roman sounded when she spoke! Her words expressed an infinite longing for the Spring—for its daffodils and amaranths, for the lustre of its sunshine and the love-philter of its fragrant shade. Here was her wild-rose garden, and in that enchanting stillness we walked an hour up and down the little pergola heaped with wistaria vines that laid fantastic flickering shadows at our feet.

"Is it true, Hebe," I asked, "that you are descended from a Roman girl whom in early Christian centuries Romulus Augustulus loved, and whose cupbearer she was?"

"My father said so, Signorino, and so his father said,—it is a story thus handed down for fifteen hundred years."

"Mr. Marblehead tells me you will leave Rome with him next summer as *his* cupbearer."

"For shame, Signorino!"

"But he adds that you are pledged to marry another."

"Possibly, Signorino."

"You have confided to me that the Holy Office has a watch upon you."

"Alas, Signorino!"

"And that some mysterious and perhaps tragic tie unites your imagination with a vanished age."

"Which you do not believe, Signorino."

"*Povera ragazza*, you are abundantly provided with sources of unhappiness."

"Signorino, will you show me a way out of them?"

"Tell me first how you found a way in."

Instead of answering, the girl fixed her eyes with abhorrence upon a young man wearing a chasseur costume who stood at the end of the path. Turning without a word, she left me and walked back the way we had come. I instinctively knew the stranger, in his Papalino brigand uniform, to be Hebe's betrothed, Gardullo Mangicane. He was a perfect Apollo—in pigskin—having the mark of the beast in his sombre-eyed, weather-beaten face. His glance followed Hebe's retreating figure; then, looking at me with the furtive scrutiny of a cunning animal, he lifted his hand in grave salutation and sauntered carelessly away

As midday drew near, I returned to the Villa, and coming into its darkened vestibule beheld Hebe before a table filling a porcelain vase with roses and fine

leaves; and standing thus amid crimson flowers that seemed the setting of her golden age, she looked so magically beautiful that in the witchery of that shaded moment the world might have taken her for a poet's creation, as elusive, yet as enchanting, as the strange memories she loved. Years after, I begged that trifling vase of Vaini; and now each Maytime, when the perfume of Italy touches the air, I fill it with great roses and fine leaves and place it far from the sunshine, where in an hour's retrospect I breathe anew the scent of Hebe's garden, and hand in hand walk once again with haunting memories.

III.

One Sunday morning, some weeks later, when the suave days of April tempted me to hours of exercise or idleness on the Campagna, I was sketching at Castel dei Pazzi, five miles from Rome. Vaini had cautioned me to take a revolver on my rambles, as the sheepdogs are fierce and many; but neither he nor I nor Orion possessed such a weapon, and in Papal days the purchase of firearms was discouraged. But in the Professor's table drawer lay an ivory-handled stiletto with a slender shining blade, and this he bade me take on my excursions.

"Better than nothing," he said, with a laugh,—"whether against mongrels with two legs or four."

Whilst putting the finishing touches to my sketch, I became instinctively conscious of an unseen presence. Turning abruptly, I beheld Gardullo Mangicane standing a few paces behind, and my surprise at this stealthy approach was such that my hand dropped to the slender-bladed stiletto. He perceived the movement, smiled, and carelessly wished me good-morning.

"This is an intrusion," he murmured; "yet it is but for a moment, and you will not refuse a word of advice. I wish," he added with malicious intention, "to ask your opinion of the girl I am to marry—la bella Cesarano."

"What should I have to say about her?" I exclaimed.

"Much," he answered, with a show of snarling temper, -"you that know her so well. I begin to suspect she loves elsewhere. Other men, look you, whistle and their girl comes: at sight of me at Nemi she started, and left not only me—but you."

"Why, then, do you wed her?"

"Because I gave my promise to her dying father of blessed memory,—alas, dear man, he died as poor as a Spaniard. What of that against my pledged word? Let it pass too that I should be justified in objecting to the influence and example of the illustrissimo Professor, who spends his time (and hers) in studies all sensible men condemn, or of your dissolute companion, who avows his purpose to corrupt her. But who shall say she is not more imminently menaced from another quarter?"

"That other quarter," I assented, replacing my colours and brushes, "being, of course, a return to the convent. So you are in no haste to set the wedding-bells ringing!"

An Italian's face darkens curiously in moments of anger, and a sinister shadow gathered now upon the Cacciatore's visage. "Do you think," he cried, "that I will see the girl taken from me? My redress is swift and easy. You presume to taunt,—and a voice to which you shall be made to listen will answer."

I rose and looked him steadfastly in the eyes. "La bella Cesarano, as you call her," I said, dwelling upon the name, "has already spoken, and what she said

pleases me. I have heard enough from you,—may I soon hear the voice to which I shall be made to listen?" And, waving a careless defiance, I walked away.

It was my intention, on going to Vaini's the following day, to tell him of my meeting with Gardullo. But I perceived an unusual preoccupation in his curt *buongiorno*, and knew something impended. Before him lay a Roman tile, and pointing to it: "Let me begin," he said, as I seated myself, "by congratulating you upon having detected the principle of ancient colour-language, of which, to my amazement, you spoke some months ago. I believe its knowledge to be limited to half a dozen men. At that moment I was not disposed to discuss so technical a subject with an amateur, but now, circumstances connected with it and involving us all, oblige me to put you on your guard. The Papal Government does not share our passion for the occult, and my experiments have incurred displeasure. I may be summoned before the Holy Office and ordered to leave Rome, in which event my papers will perhaps be destroyed. With them might perish this painted tile, which is the material demonstration of the only Secret of Olympus man's ingenuity has surprised. You cannot be seriously involved, therefore I wish to entrust it to your keeping, together with my elucidation of its meaning."

"But, Maestro," I interrupted, startled at his words, "make your escape while you may, and leave the rest with me."

"Suspected, watched, and without a passport, I should not go far," observed Vaini; "moreover the attempt would be an avowal of wrong. To ignorant eyes this object conveys nothing. In your portfolio its translation would pass unnoticed. I commend them both to your greatest care."

So saying, the Professor placed in my hands a slightly broken Roman tile and a sheet of paper covered with his minute handwriting. The tile is of terra cotta, ten inches by six, and half an inch thick. At that moment I bestowed upon it only a hasty inspection, but subsequently it was often examined by me during Professor Vaini's lifetime, and now, after thirty-four years, acting as his literary executor, I give to the world its facsimile [see frontispiece] and his exposition of its conjectured meaning translated by me from Italian into English.

"I found this tile," he said, "ten years ago in a trench I was authorised to sink across the site of the Temple of Diana in the so-called gardens beside the Lake of Nemi. Its design represents, as you see, a golden vessel filled with flowers, suspended against an intricate background. At that time I had progressed little farther in colour-language than you have done, but recognised in this a marvellous specimen. A consultation with three of my confrères in Berlin achieved no more than to satisfy us all that it is a poem relating to the Lake of Nemi, which, as every one knows, was sacred to Diana. Here and there a word could be conjectured, through comparison with the half-dozen clue fragments which are all that have been deciphered since the discovery was first made in the time of Cosimo dei Medici.

"Its meaning might have remained unknown had it not been revealed to me under extraordinary circumstances. You may be aware that two years ago, having detected in the girl Hebe Cesarano a mind marvellously receptive of occult phenomena, and a familiar knowledge of ancient times which, however elusive, is always original and accurate, I commenced with her a series of mesmeric exercises intended to recover this shadowy association. The result alternated between much failure and an occasional luminous remembrance. I was about to abandon the experiment, when it occurred to me to direct her mesmerised intelligence upon this tile. To my wonder she read it at sight and evidently from memory. Neither I nor any one can explain this, nor can she—when not in a mesmeric condition—

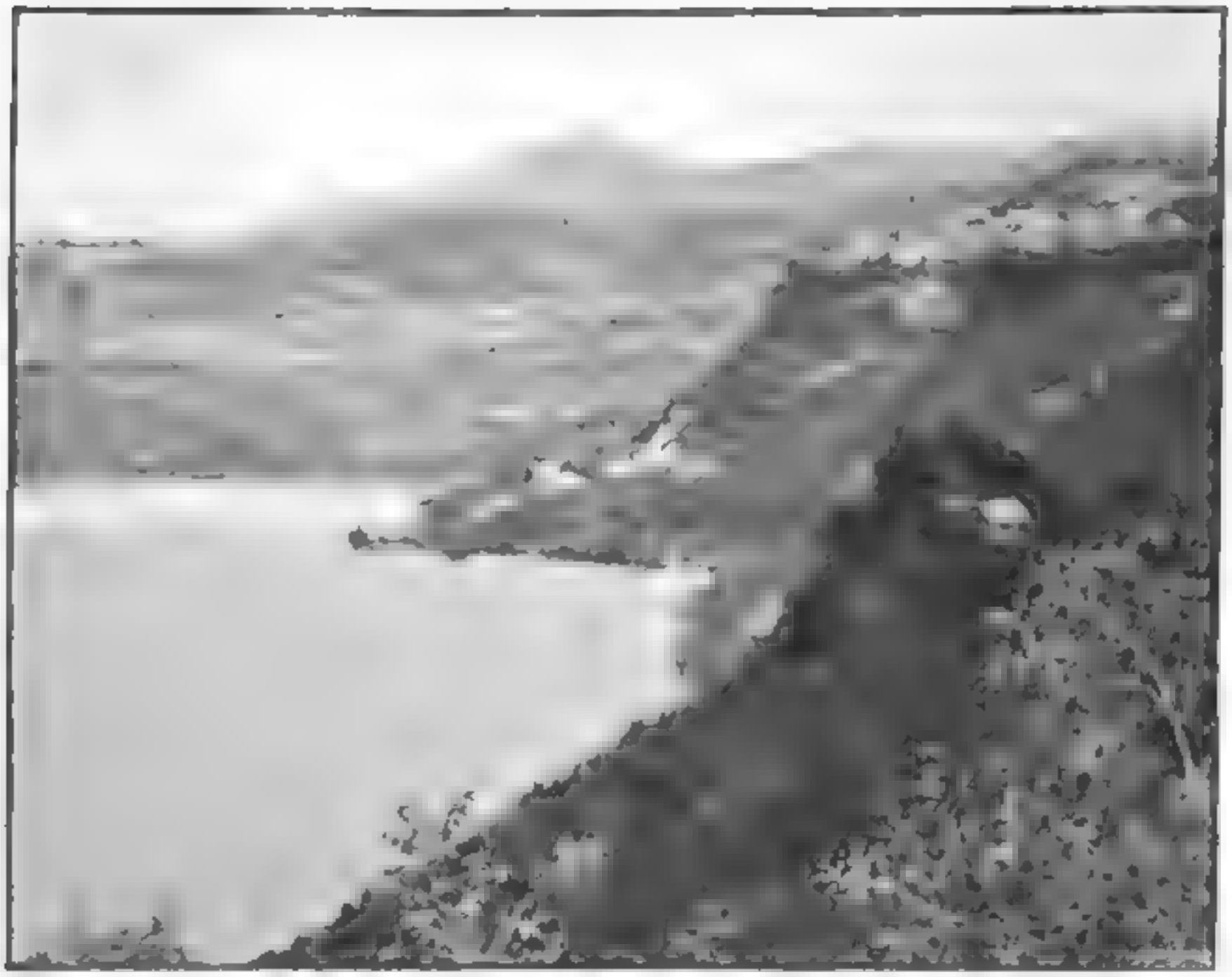
discern any meaning in its design. Through various tests the fact remains that, when her faculties are specially roused and applied, she possesses a curious power of recalling incidents that happened many centuries ago. So much for Hebe Cesarano.

"Now, no man will doubt that certain colours produce special and invariable impressions upon the mind. From this simple perception the ancients elaborated the significance of particular blendings and juxtapositions. A remote antiquity recognised that human emotion is reflected and expressed in the aspect of natural things. The changing face of clouds—the crystalline line of the horizon—the flush of dawn—the sapphire of the sea—opalescent tints upon the mountain—the statuesqueness of a splendid tree—an emerald meadow, asphodel strewn—a wave leaping in the sunshine—these and many like were the stigmata, the brandmarks upon which they fixed a distinct and universal meaning. To the Greeks, colour interpreted the profoundest human emotion. The beauty of the scenes they loved inspired them with a lyric note, and herein they perceived a motive as tender and intense as human voice. They believed that far in advance of them the Immortals, when they walked upon earth, understood that in form and colour lies a mystical expression of the heart of things. What wonder that upon a foundation thus gifted and inspired—seeing intuitively that everything gracious and refined has its perspective—the priests and poets and musicians developed and perfected a colour-language in whose subtle diction they wove a gamut of limitless expression! So enduring was their work that across the wreck of the ancient world it survived through the ages of crusading chivalry in heraldic blazonments and bannerets and distinctive costume."

I lost not a moment in transferring the tile to my apartment, where, pushing aside a wardrobe in my bedroom and raising the carpet, I removed two tiles from the floor, leaving a space into which I laid my charge. The midday gun at St. Angelo marked the hour as I finished, and with its sound came a tap at my sitting-room door.

Without waiting an answer, two men crossed its threshold—one a cleric, with the suave and unctuous manner inseparable from the Roman priest, the other a police official in civilian dress. A rough-looking fellow stood in the hall in reserve, had I proved troublesome; but this I was far from doing. Personally I had nothing more serious to anticipate than an order to leave Rome. I was obviously to be interrogated with a view to coaxing or coercing from me some damaging admissions about Vaini and the others. A hundred and fifty years earlier the recipient of a summons from the Holy Office would not have listened to it with composure. As recently as the middle eighteenth century there were forcible methods of persuasion. But in the reign of Pius IX. the faggots were cold, the thumbscrews rusted, the scabbard empty.

A few words explained that the Holy Office wished information which I could give; and upon my assurance that everything I knew was at its disposal, we descended to a closed carriage. As we drove away I noticed a man loitering on the opposite side of the piazza with a cloak drawn round him, and under the shadow of his soft broad hat I recognised Gardullo Mangicane. We drove in silence to the Via St. Ufizio, where, shown into the room of a subordinate secretary, I was invited to give my name and age, and to state whether I had any pecuniary means of support. I answered I had none. I was further required to exhibit such articles as were in my pockets, to show that I carried no weapon. Luckily Vaini's stiletto was in my table drawer with the sketching materials. These brief formalities disposed of, I was led up a circular flight of stone stairs to a door



The Lake of Nemi.

SPECULUM DIANAE

This to the artist of life, the singer, the sweet musician—
She whose voice is musical as the beat of receding oars.
She whispers, "Here is my mirror, my painted veil;
From its deep, O Lover, watching the sun kissed ripple,
May rise the remembered image you seek.

The scar-faced crag is young in the light of morning,
Beneath it the lakeside thrills with melody;
The gods listen to rustic pipe and lute-string,
Laughing, as nearer the shepherdess ventures,—
Till the arms of the amorous faun are about her!

What is life, if when we are young we love not?
Or what burden is heavier than a heart grown cold?
The fugitive days come and go while we linger—
Beloved, take the most flowery way to thy fate,
Ere the God-bestowed gift of dreamless sleep be thine.

Translation into English of Hebe Cesarano's rendering into Italian of the colour-language expressed on the painted Roman tile. (See FRONTISPIECE.)

where an official waited, by whom I was conducted into the presence of a small man, who, having risen from his writing table, was walking leisurely to and fro with his hands behind him. This was Monsignor Beltà. He turned as I entered, and eyed me with keen steel-grey eyes, whilst taking a pinch of snuff. I noticed a small-pox mark over his right brow, and observed his habit of fingering the border of his soutane with thumb and forefinger.

He motioned me to a chair, seated himself, and for ten minutes plied me with rapid questions. Then he paused, took another pinch of snuff, and reflectively rubbed his soutane as though verifying its texture.

"This Professor Vaini," he continued, "with whom you say you study literature, is a man of sinister fame. How came you to hear his name?—who sent you to him?"

"My confirmation teacher in New York was by birth an Italian—a schoolmate and friend of Vaini."

"Tell me exactly the nature of your studies"

"I seek the truth. I wish to know great lives. I pursue Nature, because it is purer than man and more beautiful than woman."

"You have a fellow-student, of whose morals I receive bad reports. He openly avows the intention to abduct a Roman girl--Hebe Cesarano."

"Monsignore, my own morals are above suspicion, but I dare not vouch for those of my friends."

"Young man!" he exclaimed angrily, "take heed to your answers: there is a persiflage about them must instantly be corrected –by yourself or by me. As to the girl, she is compromised in reputation with your fellow student, she is an adept or disciple of Vaini's necromantic hallucinations; she is also betrothed to an excellent man, an officer in the Cacciatori. Now, what is she to you?"

"Monsignore, she has promised to be a sister to me."

"I have a great mind to give you and your sister thirty days *al segreto*."

"Monsignore! All that lightning to kill a mosquito!"

"Here's a last chance to save yourself. Conjurors, wizards, and such folk are not taken seriously in our time. But there are political jugglers who unsettle the mind and the faith. As you hope for Paradise, have you ever seen among Vaini's private books anything of a revolutionary character?'

"Monsignore, he possesses a volume entitled 'Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies.'"

"Young man, you are an impudent fool Had you been wise, you would have known that to be friends with me is more profitable than to be the dupe of a charlatan and the lover of a half-crazed girl. Begone and sin no more. I shall keep an eye upon you, and at the slightest indiscretion . . . ."

It was two o'clock when I stood again in the Via St. Ufizio, free—and wiping from my brow the moisture of that anxious half-hour. To ascertain if I were followed, I walked to an unfrequented street near by, hastened down it, then faced about. Had the Dogger skulked at my heels, I should in that moment's excitement have been capable of doing him a mischief; but there was no one in sight. Vaini's lodging was doubtless under surveillance, but the greater his danger the more urgent that he be warned. I sprang into a passing fiacre and drove to Trinità dei Monti. The Professor's study was empty, and so, after knocking, I found his bedroom. I inferred that he had been summoned at the same time as myself, and was doubtless at that moment in the presence of

Monsignor Beltà. And Hebe,—the hall door opened, and in came Hebe, having heard my step from her own room. I felt aggravated at the unconcern with which she listened to my breathless recital, till abruptly I spoke of what I conceived to be her own danger.

With gentle sadness she answered: "My only danger from the Holy Office is that which has befallen many women—to be taken to a convent and there remain. You may trust Gardullo to see to it that I am not thus removed from his reach."

Then, shaken by a sudden gust of passion, she exclaimed, with face in a crimson blaze: "Do you know why Gardullo wishes to marry me?—I am to be sold to his patron, the Prince of Messina. They have both dared tell me so, and offer me a palace."

How those great deep tragic eyes flashed as she added: "They are loathsome to me, one as the other. I am afraid of the illustrissimo Professor, and as for Signor Orion—he is too wise. You alone, Signorino, have been good. You care for me a little, though you have not said so. Hush! do not speak. I know what you would say. Is not silence the language of *Divino Amore*?"

I was startled and confused at the utterance of an emotion I had not suspected. Then the intense look faded and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh," she sobbed, "I am so unhappy!" and at the words, heedlessly, our hands met. "What is the day worth if we always labour? Let us give our life to calm. Let us go away together," she whispered, in a voice like cadenced music. "Come, no matter whither, so it be where none can find us; come, ere youth be spent and our hearts grown heavy, and I will love you with the pagan love—for love's own sake."

Our hands had met; and how often in after years, walking through beautiful solitudes—and amid the scent of flowers and the song of birds remembering Hebe—how often have I asked myself, would it have been well for us if that handclasp had been for life?

I read the proud courage in her face, and found in myself heroic self restraint to answer, "It would be foolhardy in you, Hebe—and wrong in me."

"Will you leave me to Gardullo?" she cried, seeing I dared not look my temptress in the eyes, her face so close to mine that as she spoke the soft black hair brushed against me.

The word stung me to fury. I had about me a dozen *louis d'or* and a French bank-note for a thousand francs, which I pressed into her hand. I dared not trust myself to linger. I was twenty-two, and before me stood a splendid being of life and love.

"Escape," I ejaculated, "at your own time and in your own way."

Then, turning my face from that delirious temptation, I rushed from the room. Never before had I realised what magnanimous courage it may require to run away.

IV.

During the week which ensued we were left unmolested. We had all, however, become so nervous and unsettled that study was discontinued, and Mr. Marblehead agreed with me that it would be to our tutor's peace of mind if we both left Rome. The ill-will of the authorities might relax towards the Professor if his pupils withdrew from the Papal dominion. I therefore obtained the official *visa* to my passport, and called for a few thousand francs at my bankers' preparatory

to a summer in the Alps. Vaini had already betaken himself to his rural retirement, and thither Orion and I went for a day to take leave of him—and of Hebe.

We alighted at Rocca di Falco at the Ave Maria. Supper was immediately served, and we spent an hour in desultory conversation upon the existing political situation of Italy—little thinking that at that moment (May 1870) the Papal Government had but four months to live.

The Professor retired early, and Mr. Marblehead and I went out for a few minutes' contemplation of the stars and the sombre outline of the hills. I remember that the night was one of great darkness, to which, coming from the light of the dining-room, it was some moments before our eyes became accustomed. The new moon, Diana's slender crescent, was rising, and cast a faint shimmer upon Nemi. We walked in silence a few moments through the grove, when suddenly Orion, laying his hand lightly about my shoulder, said, "You and I have been good friends, and now we are about to part, perhaps never to meet again. In bidding you goodbye I wish to take you into my confidence—for to-morrow evening, by this time, I shall have disappeared."

"You will have disappeared?" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes, but not alone. Hebe Cesarano is coming with me."

The sting which those words inflicted is fresh and keen in my remembrance to this day. Rarely has a spoken word dealt me such pain. Had Hebe's declaration to me been mere deception? or, failing other means of escape from her betrothed and his patron, had she yielded at last to my companion's persuasion? I listened in a dull and angry stupor while he talked on.

"Yessir, I have never failed,—failure is against Nature, for Nature does not fail. Man fails only when he has not mastered the ways of Nature, or when he does not know how to handle his tools. I have had enough of Vaini and the psycho-psychical. Hebe has agreed to let down the gang-plank and ferry me to Elysium. I tell you she is a white alley, and I intend to make her live up to her label. After the honeymoon I shall put her on the stage, and the Dogger shall lurk around as the heavy villain. If he misbehaves I will knock him bald-headed. I shall make them both play up. I wanted to say all this right now, because by this time to-morrow—— Well, give me an hour's start, and——"

I did not hear the completion of the familiar phrase. While Orion spoke I became conscious, for all the blackness of the night, of a figure stealthily following from tree to tree. Suddenly I turned from my companion and rushed upon the intruder. But, at my first movement, whoever it was bounded away out of sight.

"What did you see?" inquired Mr. Marblehead.

"I saw Gardullo Mangicane," I answered; and bidding him good-night, sought the long wakeful hours I knew awaited me.

I was out next morning at an early hour, seeking in the refreshment of sunrise shadows and sunrise silence to efface something of the bitterness of the fevered night. It was a day of untroubled calm, and looking across the lake to the lilac-woven drapery covering the hillside, the eye roved over vistas of transcendent loveliness. A voluptuous breath of spring was in the air, for we were touching the heart of Maytime. The broadening day mellowed the silhouette of Monte Cavo, and where sunshine fell on lichen-stained wall and crumbling terrace the moss became luminous as gold in ancient tapestry. A filmy wood smoke rose above Nemi, the humming-bees were tuning in the orchard, and I remember the air was sweet with odour of wild strawberries. Before me lay Diana's mirror, motionless and blue-green as shot silk, typical to my fancy of those springs and fountains of antiquity into which I had been dipping. Diana's silver mirror! . . .

that may have reflected the goddess standing knee-deep in its shallows—that men declare keeps her reflected image to this day. For the Immortals were always in their best attire, even when ungirdled for the bath, and their statuesque nudity is never immodest nor their raiment insufficient, though it be but a leafing vine.

Before me, at the water's edge, grew a willow of such brilliant green that it seemed almost yellow—the golden yellow of a flask of Episcopio. Beside it rose a great rock, and I halted in amaze at sight of the figure which stood beyond it, knee-deep, with uplifted arms as though to salute the sunrising. It was Diana in the living form of Hebe Cesarano, her beautiful white body looking like ivory—yet less a living woman than a charmed semblance. She did not see me hidden behind the rock in the shelter of which she had approached the water and beside which her clothing lay. Beneath the lustre of the bending willow she seemed a caryatide—a masterpiece of Grecian curves—a morsel for the gods. I lingered a breathless moment, and what man with love of woman in his blood will blame me! Here was the habit of the nude of ancient times that rose unabashed from the sea—that now bending launched like an out-bound prow and swam away into deep water—and with it departed the magic of a beauty which ever since, it seems to me, the living world has lost.

Thus was it once given me to behold a poet's dream, and that fugitive vision has remained with me through life. I have often revisited Nemi, and lingered in the wild-rose garden, and walked by the lake shore at the place where, on that morning, Hebe stood. The daffodils still scatter the hillside with their shower of gold. Against the rocks are the same trailing tapestries of moss, each at sunrise tipped with glistening dew. I walk through scenes delightfully familiar—yet removed from me by an immeasurable distance. A pulse of sadness floats across their tender beauty, when I remember the presence that once was their poetic charm. I shall never again behold her; but now Time, with a thrill akin to rich accords of music, weaves for me an exquisite witchery about those happy days.

I had promised to remain with Vaini until the following morning, and we spent several hours together in his study taking a retrospective survey of many philosophical subjects. He showed me his portfolio filled with original gleanings and scientific queries and curious problems in those fascinating realms of speculation wherein he was a master. Since his death that portfolio is in my possession, and on many a quiet afternoon I turn over its neat manuscript pacquets, which, in their variety and brilliancy, bear token to the range and activity of their author's mind.

After our midday repast of bean soup and fried sardines I went to reconnoitre the grove where, on the previous evening, I had missed tapping Gardullo's head with my stick. "He will skulk among these trees again to-night," I thought, examining the ground and its approaches. Then I remembered—"what matter if he come?—it can only be in quest of Hebe, and this evening she and Orion will be posting northward miles away."

I had no heart to talk with Hebe, nor had I aught further to say to Mr. Marblehead. I thought to leave them to their own contrivings, and so strolled to a little trellised arbour wreathed with wild grape-vines. The thought of Gardullo's spying presence led me to meditate upon the shapes and phantoms and fleeting spectres with which the ancients peopled their world. The Greeks and Romans can rarely have felt themselves wholly alone, for though they heard not the footfall . . .

Footfall! Yes, it was beside me, and there stood Hebe Cesarano, fixing me with great questioning eyes.

I motioned her to a seat. For nearly an hour we talked, and often I seek to remember the unselfish and endearing things then said. It was a last long rapturous leave-taking—for ever. Such farewells are rarely quite dry-eyed; but in those early days I knew nothing of such matters, and it was with astonishment I beheld Hebe's eyes dimmed with tears. I drew her close—to see; and perhaps hereafter the impulse of that wayward instant will be forgiven, since for both it was a kiss that meant good-bye.

"Hebe," I asked, "shall we ever lose our way in Paradise, or will the path always be clear, think you, that leads to those we love?"

She pointed to the sky overhead, where some brilliant birds were winging their swift undeviating course. "The birds will lead us to one another," she answered, "for we know that love follows their flight."

And with the word she sprang into the sunshine—the suave sunshine that softens so many griefs—and was gone.

All that afternoon I was oppressed with consciousness of impending danger. When supper-time came, Vaini and Madonna Cesarano were puzzled at the simultaneous disappearance of Orion Marblehead, Hebe and Facino. I was not so much surprised, and held my peace. The Professor and I sat down to his favourite *risotto*, followed by a *fritata*; and as the evening was chilly I persuaded him to drink a measure of Albano. He had devoted the afternoon to compiling the description of an excavation made in April under the cellar of a house on the Via Goito, where he penetrated into the crypt within which in Roman days were entombed alive the Vestals who had sinned. It is written with his forceful brevity, and I never pass the Ministero delle Finanze, built some years later on that locality, without thinking of the gruesome substructure it covers. The crypt was intact, and has never since been visited; and Vaini dwells upon the ghastly horror which came over him as he descended the flight of stone steps down which those unhappy women went to their living tomb.

Presently we heard some one at the outer door. "It must be Orion or Hebe," exclaimed Vaini and Madonna Cesarano, and I followed them to see. The night was inky black. In the courtyard stood Facino, with a woman's dress and bonnet over his arm. He had been persuaded by his sister, so he said, to clothe himself at dark in one of her gowns, tie her bonnet and veil about his head, and seat himself beside Orion in the travelling carriage which waited near Genzano. They had not driven a mile when his identity was discovered; and then——

"And then?" we asked.

Then the Signore had caught him by the throat, dragged him out of the carriage, and kicked him across the road. "Beata Vergine! how the Americano swore!"

"But why were you in the carriage? and where is Hebe?" screamed his mother, shaking him furiously.

It was a family dispute, and discretion prompted me to stroll through the grove.

What happened immediately thereafter? There was a man's sudden outcry. Vaini, Madonna, and Facino came running to me, and together we cautiously made our way to where—flat on his back, with outstretched arms—lay Gardullo Mangicane, speechless, fast losing consciousness, his chasseur jacket open and the blood oozing from a stab in his throat. He had been violently stilettoed, and whoever dealt the blow had vanished as by enchantment.

Who but Hebe could have wounded him?—in self defence, of course.

"Passed through the gate that never closes."

Lanterns were brought and the leisurely police came from Genzano. There was much talking and many futile questions were asked and repeated.

"But what," still cried Madonna Cesarano, "has become of Hebe?"

"Whom the gods love die hard," whispered the Professor. "Hebe has stabbed him and thrown herself into the lake."

Madonna heard, and filled the air with lamentation.

"Hebe dead? GONE!—no further than from dawn to sunrise, but for ever. Dead! Aye, passed through the gate that never closes, and climbed the blossomed steps."

Early next morning we learned that Gardullo was not dangerously hurt. He had soon recovered consciousness, his throat had been dressed; in a day or two he might be able to speak, and then the truth would be known.

An hour later I bade Professor Vaini a grateful and affectionate farewell, drove to Rome for my luggage, and crossed the frontier of the Papal dominion that evening. A dozen years elapsed before I again beheld Italy.

Madonna Cesarano sleeps in the graveyard of Ariccia. I saw her once again, in 1883, the time worn hands still busy, her hair turned white as the wool she was spinning. Facino, grown prodigiously fat, converted Rocca di Falco into an inn where, keeping up the brigand traditions of the family, he fleeces the sojourner.

More than once, in subsequent years, I spoke with Vaini about the events of that tragic evening. At first he declared Hebe's disappearance to be a case of suicide, affirming that her bones moulder in the depths of the lake. But on the last occasion I reverted to the subject he merely smiled and gazed out of the window with an amused expression.

In the winter of 1895 I drove from Rome to Isola Farnese, where an Etruscan tomb was to be opened. After its inspection I lingered to look at the church. A little old padre in rusty gown and berretta came out to salute me, in whose face was something familiar. Where had I seen those faded steel-grey eyes, those fine lips, and the small-pox mark on the right brow? It was Monsignor Beltà, voluble and unctuous, and still fingering his soutane. He was less favoured now with the gifts of Mammon, and seemed pleased when I invited him to sit in my carriage while the horses were harnessed, and share my luncheon of galantine and Irroy brut.

Suddenly addressing him by name, I said, "Monsignor Beltà, you and I have met before."

He looked at me intently, without recognition.

"May 1870—Professor Vaini—Hebe Cesarano," I murmured, watching him with malicious pleasure.

The glass fell from his hand.

"I will be more merciful than you were with me," I added, "and ask only one question. What became of Hebe?"

"Signore, she was but a girl—not twenty; and you, a friend of the wizard, know that the Olympians were all in their prime when they vanished—not one grown old or deaf or blear-eyed or imbecile. This was because they had a finer instinct than we to discern the poetry in life's ending."

"But what has this to do with Hebe?"

There was a twinkle of amusement in the steel-grey eyes as he answered, "Since you wish me to speak seriously, was she not one of them, and could she do less than they?"

This persiflage was so little convincing, that when a year later accident guided

me to the whereabouts of my former fellow-student, I wrote, presuming so far upon our acquaintance as to ask him the same question—what became of Hebe Cesarano? A week later I received the following extraordinary reply:—

"SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS,
"*April 13th*, 1896.

"DEAR SIR,—

"Your letter reminds me that twenty-six years ago you were as tender as I on that beautiful psychological problem. I never doubted it was your kind thought placed her brother in my carriage. And at this time of day it seems rather cool to ask what became of Hebe, when no one can answer that question so well as yourself.

"Yours very truly,
"ORION MARBLEHEAD.

"P.S.—How is your friend the Dogger?"

In the autumn of 1890, whilst traversing Eighth Avenue, in New York, I observed a man beating his dog. As the animal ran away, the man raised himself, and I recognised Gardullo Mangicane. Beside his shop-door was the familiar red-and-white striped pole, and the sign: "*George Magician. Tonsorial Artist.*"

Thus was an Italian name Americanised, and thus had Hebe's *fiancé* become a thriving barber.

I paused before him, and said in Italian: "Judas, is that you?"

He glanced up with the old sinister look, recognised me, and rubbed his hands with fawning salutation.

"After twenty years," I said, "I am still in doubt as to the events of that evening. Have you ever discovered who attacked you?"

"Signorino," he answered, "if Paradise were opening before me and this were my last word upon earth, I would swear it was you struck me with a slender shining blade."

I turned on my heel, wondering what he and Mr. Marblehead could be thinking about. Not many days later I read this notice in the *Express*:—

"An Italian barber, named George Magician, living at 1754 Eighth Avenue, where he was much respected, lost his life yesterday while attempting to drown his dog in the Hudson River. Tying a cord round the animal's neck, and weighting it, Mr. Magician threw the dog from a boat, but in endeavouring to keep it under with a pole, overbalanced himself, fell overboard and was drowned. The dog escaped."

So perished the Dogger.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

I.

IN May 1875, while reading law in New York, I received a letter from Professor Vaini urging me to meet him in London during the following month for an experiment of extreme importance. He called it "A Glimpse behind the Veil," and I was surprised to infer that he was bent upon a hunt for buried treasure. He mentioned a Roman Votive Spring, and avowed the purpose of penetrating a field mapped only by conjecture. "Come at once," he added, "do not hesitate or delay, and together we will hear the rustle of unloosing wings."

I had been in correspondence with Vaini ever since my Roman studies five years previously,* and to-day, turning over his memoranda written during those intervening years, I note with interest that his multitudinous activities had brought him to the verge of discovering the origin of the ordinary elements at whose threshold scientific research is now trembling. I need not say that I was flattered at being invited to share a purpose of Vaini's vivid and illuminating life. I longed to renew with him my investigation of psychical phenomena, and immediately arranged to take my two months' holiday in England. Before me lie Vaini's jottings upon our adventure, and I shall use them to supplement my recollection of that enchanted garden which thirty years ago was Yesterday. It is my aim to write a restrained narrative of our experience, as to which it has always been my belief that Vaini and I grazed the confines of a world beyond our own. If I seem to presume upon my readers' indulgence, it should be remembered that the truth is sometimes evolved from facts in themselves incredible.

When we met in London, he explained the scope and aim of our quest. Like a true artist he loved his leisure, and I listened for an hour while he painted his scheme as only one can do who realises the atmosphere of thought. It was always a delight to follow his method, for his phrases were of the diamond edition. He believed that from Moses and the prophets the greatest things have been accomplished by self-illuminating light, and now drew the outline of his project boldly, leaving it to Time, his fellow-worker, to fill in accessories. From youth alone against the world, Vaini had entered the arena as it were with no weightier battalion than a set of intellectual chessmen—a tiny *corps d'élite*—yet at

* See PALL MALL MAGAZINE of December 1904.

his touch so animated with supernatural prowess, that when marshalled against earthly forces, the array seemed not unequal. His inductions were reflected by many mental mirrors; and of all men I have known, none possessed in an equal degree the art of captivating imagination. His finest inferences rested upon an anticipation of that belief in universal symmetry which in our own time Science is demonstrating to be the fundamental truth.

He began by reminding me of the half-dozen Votive Springs thus far discovered in Italy. Students of Roman archæology are familiar with the custom which prevailed from remote antiquity of casting offerings into such lakes or springs as were held sacred, and especially into those whose hygienic properties attracted invalids. Whoever wished to propitiate the deity, or give thanks for a cure, threw into the water according to his means. The discovery of a Votive Spring, which is usually the result of accident, is an event of great numismatic importance. At the top will be found the opulent offerings of Imperial days in a layer of gold coins of the Cæsars. Beneath lie silver vessels and moneys of the Republic. Under this rests a mass of copper and brass—coin, graven figures and kitchen utensils. Lastly is uncovered a bed of flints and arrowheads, the offerings of the prehistoric elect.

"It is well known," continued Vaini, "that a Votive Spring of immense antiquity existed at Aquæ Sulis, the modern Bath. When Titus founded there the colony which by reason of its warm mineral waters he named Aquæ Calidæ, the settlers found a local deity whom they seem to have accepted as the genius of the place. I spent a week at Bath last summer, comparing the references of ancient writers with its topography, and in the Museum I observed a tablet engraved:

FLAVIÆ. EPICHA(RIDI). SACER(DOTIÆ).
DEÆ. VIRGINIS. CELESTI(S).
"*To Flavia Epicharis, a priestess of the Celestial Virgin.*"

"Observe that this Virgo Celestis can be no other than the Carthaginian Astarte whose worship was introduced by Phœnician traders at a time when Britain was unknown to Rome."

"Have you any knowledge as to the whereabouts of this spring?" I asked.

"I have placed it within the surface of an acre," answered Vaini. "Curiously, it is at a mathematical point on the hillside where the shadows of yesterday's sunset and to-day's sunrise meet."

"Were this treasure found," I objected, "the Government would snatch it from you."

"The Government," he answered with feverish intensity, "cannot snatch the credit of the most remarkable archæological discovery of the century in England."

"But you are not even sure there was a Votive Spring."

"Its existence," said the Professor, "is established by the writing of Sulpicius Arens, a Roman priest who perished in the destruction of Aquæ Sulis, and who some years previously addressed a letter to the Flamens of the Celestial Virgin in other lands. He tells his colleagues that, upon the rising of the Britons, the Spring will be buried. He defines its position with reference to the river, the city wall, and the Vicus Sacri Fontis."

"Dear Master, you seem very familiar with Aquæ Sulis?"

"Yes, for I possess one of the three existing copies of the writing of Sulpicius—the work of a monkish hand, which in 1499 Ormès discovered in a mutilated condition, pasted in the leaves of a great Psalter."

I knew that Vaini's mind was an instrument so keen and adaptable, so expert

in opening intellectual paths, as to be adequate even to a fantastic achievement. The next day found us established at a little inn beside the Avon, on the outskirts of Bath, which for more than a century had borne the name of Castle Joyous. My companion had hired it for a month, knowing that we should find there greater freedom and privacy than at the fashionable "Pump." The first I saw of Castle Joyous was its peaked roof splashed with emerald moss. Its walls were two feet thick and its roof-beams black as ebony. Beside the house was a little old garden—a tangle of crystal roses that even in their abandonment amid great edgings of box would have pleased the most learned rosarian. Looking thence into the sparkling Avon, one might behold disused stepping-stones beneath the water and fancy on them the noiseless footfalls treading to and fro. Who could say they might not lead half-way to our imagined goal!

Mrs. Oldcorn served for me a supper of grilled bones and a bottle of the Espiritu Santo sherry I had brought from London, and a "Hamlet of eggs" for Vaini. His diet was limited to fish, eggs and vegetables, and I had so far brought myself to conform to his abstemiousness that, after finishing my steak or chop, I usually shared his brain-building food. Our landlady was one of the listless-eyed and tired cattle of her class, and a liberal consumer of the boiled mutton which thirty years ago figured upon English tables. "Brave and 'artsome, that's what I am," and might have added close hauled on week-days, till on Sunday afternoons she acquired what sailors call a list to port.

The next morning, breakfasting upon Stargazer pie, which is fish pasty, with the heads of the fish peeping through the crust, Vaini and I addressed ourselves to the serious features of our undertaking. "It is true," he began, "that if touched by a calculation of absolute nicety, the hiding place may disclose itself, as a heart wrung by intense emotion reveals its secret. The doors of knowledge are sometimes opened by the simplest key. On the other hand, our search for this ton of gold, which I have come to regard as my reversionary heritage, may be dangerous. Your real artist," he added, producing a curious mechanical appliance, "does not work with borrowed tools; and after prolonged experiment, I have constructed this revolving drill of the finest steel, with a receptacle behind the point. Its boring power into the earth is only six feet, but in my belief the upper crust of the treasure must be nearer the surface, and my apparatus has the advantage of being so compressible that it can be carried under the arm like a telescope. But what is of first importance is that we guard against that same agency which has played havoc with so many searchers."

"We are not the first, then, in this bed of nettles?"

"No. Sulpicius Arens tells his colleagues that attempts were made during the reigns of Constantine, of Julian, and of Valentinian—all violently frustrated by the Virgo Celestis in the semblance of a swarthy girl. In 1212 an Italian prelate named Marsilio Sarpi, visiting the Norman Cathedral of Bath, explored the fragments of the Roman Aquæ Sulis. He was fascinated and debauched by a beautiful dark girl, and being seized with remorse, became smitten with madness. In 1505 Ormès, the renowned soothsayer of the Borgias, invited his Venetian rival Almodoro to go with him into Britain, and the latter tells the story of what befell. Measuring and digging amid crumbling vestiges, the daughter of their hostess, a sombre-visaged young woman, confided to Ormès that at a particular locality then still called Vicus Sacri Fontis, the water oozed from the ground. Thither one night she conducted them, with the result that Almodoro was violently stabbed, he knew not by whom, and Ormès left dead by the roadside smitten as with the club of Hercules. The Bishop of Bath caused

Almodoro to be cared for; and the dusky maiden having disappeared, her mother's tongue was torn out and her arms and limbs crushed after which it was discovered that she was not the girl's mother.

My companion had given me material for reflection, and I strayed away for an hour's thought in the garden. There was an orchard beyond, its blossoms still sparkling with dew, and on the hill-slopes stretched billowy masses of chestnut bloom. At my feet were feathergrass and cornmaidens and Turk's-cap tulips. It was a brilliant day, and across the meadows and against the forest the advancing sunlight was spreading its eager fingers. I remember thinking it is on such a morning we are made to feel that Nature alone has never lost the strength and beauty of its childhood. There was the swift and rippling music of bird-notes in the air, and I knew that so long as birds shall make music the heart will be glad. Were they too filling the tree-tops with some delightful message, some consciousness of an unseen yet thrilling possession such as the ancients comprehended in dedicating their groves and springs? Suddenly the bird music ceased, and in that instant's hush I seemed to hear the eloquent silence speak, and became vividly aware of a presence behind me. I turned with a strange heart-spasm,—and there, in the open doorway through which I had passed, stood a dark girl, a splendid flash of sunlight in her eyes. At the sight something within me caught fire. To this day I can see the statuesque poise of her body and the black coils of her braided hair and the silken threat of her haunted eyes, unafraid and unflinching.

Yet what had caused me this emotion was but a tawny young woman, with great twists of soft hair, habited in a flamingo-red bodice, a striped green skirt, and here and there a fringe of white. She was leaning forward, watching me with the mystery of a sleeping passion. The wild thought flashed upon me that here was a repetition of the fateful force whereby, through centuries, every comer had been smitten and baffled. Was hers a face I had seen before, or only dreamt of? It was a sad face, as though weird memories crouched in its twilight. And musing upon the danger thus suddenly sprung into being, I wondered how one thus strangely summoned from remote and half fabulous regions would fare in a tragical collision with Vaini.

I walked towards her, looking beyond her face and the shining gold coin that hung at its side—seeking to reach the mind of eager devices and desires. And instinctively the cry sprang to my lips: "You here . . . . already!"

At the words she startled with a flush of amorous colour, like some strange being that for the first time hears the human voice. Then, in a murmur wherein it seemed familiar accents lingered, she answered:

"Yes, it is I. Did you not hear me calling?"

II

I lost no time in seeking Vaini in his room, where he sat before a map of Bath marked 1690. Between his fingers was the familiar green pencil with which in a jesting moment he once told me he did his mental indexing. I knew he was busy weighing the evidence of an unseen and half-forgotten world, and remember wondering at the moment whether within an Archimedes of purely intellectual force there must yet linger something earthly—the flying eagle's shadow skimming the ground.

"Professor," I abruptly ejaculated, seeing that he anticipated my ill news, "I have beheld our traditional and inexorable enemy. I verily believe" I added,

"There, in the open doorway through which I had passed, stood a dark girl"

sinking into a chair, her words still ringing in my ears, "that we have before us no mere human potency."

"It is true," he replied, with his invariable suavity, "that this Pandora Miduvel is the historic dusky girl."

"You already know her name!" I exclaimed.

"I saw her yesterday, when I too divined the meaning that looks from that face. I sent for Mrs. Oldcorn, and with my imperfect English learned something of this strange niece of hers if relative indeed she be. For all her gipsy ways, she is a young woman of education. But, caro mio, you seem troubled. You would not falter when already we stand within the enemy's lines. It cannot be doubted that a fantastic treasure lies at our feet. My effort for its recovery shall be a symphony in colour, a sonnet in porcelain, a classic of its kind. On this map I have traced the lost course of the Vicus Sacri Fontis. Sulpicius gives ingeniously the point of meeting of two lines, one a prolongation of the western city wall, the other drawn from a point on the river. From that intersection to the Votive Spring in Roman paces is, he says, *a lily, a cabbage, and an apple added together.* You follow the meaning?"

"Alas, dear Master, I follow neither his meaning nor yours."

"For the first time in our studies," replied Vaini, "I am disappointed in you. The most superficial observer of Nature knows that plants, flowers and fruits are constructively formed upon numbers. Thus the botanical key of a lily is 6; in most grasses it is 3; in apples, pears and roses, 5, while all cruciferous vegetables, such as turnips and cabbages, are formed on the ground plan of 2's and 4's. Hence the lily, the cabbage and the apple of Arens give the Roman numerals VI., IV., V., which added together make fifteen Roman paces; and this distance agrees with a point at which a line drawn from the river crosses a prolongation of the western city wall half way up the slope of Lansdowne Hill."

"To me, Professor, it all sounds like unravelling the crimson heart of a rose, or like polishing running water."

"Water!" eagerly echoed the wise man: "how many philosophers have caught golden fish in that same water! Think how often Science has kindled its flame at an alchemist's sparkling vision. But enough . . . . success means a wreath of immortal renown."

"It may mean a bullet through the brain," I added.

"What matter that we stumble, if we climb!" retorted my tutor, with a cheerful nod. "Would you not rather pace the deck than be a stowaway? Yours," he added, softening his Italian utterance to a whisper "shall be the condensed cream of this adventure. You shall have a summerful of love. You have asked more than once why I sought your co-operation Your part shall be to excite a sentimental interest in the brown girl, and lure her from the compass of my operations. I must have time and elbow-room."

"Shy as I am, and maladroit with the sex . . . ."

"It is only a bad workman," he interrupted, "that finds fault with his tools You have long been on easy terms with the deeper emotions, and now you will attack at once, remembering that in life, as in chess, the prize is with him who seizes and keeps the move. Do not let your initiative lack powder: strike once through the heart. Above all, watch the under-current of this dangerous girl's thoughts, for hereupon, very possibly, your life will depend."

"Professor," I asked, "what am I to get for all this?"

"Friend of my soul, you shall have the sprig of bay that Ladas died to reach!"

"Maestro," I murmured, after a pause, "would it displease you if I took the next train back to London?"

Vaini's face clouded at the words. "I should not have supposed it possible," he answered, in a voice of pained surprise, "that my favourite pupil could thus chagrin me twice within an hour. How can you tremble thus before fly-blown fears, when a fixed belief in oneself may touch even mediocrity like yours with that spark which to this day fires the intellectual Tenth Legion—the indomitable few?"

Accustomed as Vaini was to win men and bend them to his purpose, he would not believe that his pupil might not sway this wild girl's will. He declared that, schooled as I had been by him to scientific illusion, and habituated to

"I lost no time in seeking Vaini in his room, where he sat before a map of Bath marked 1690."

calculations as subtle as the witchery that breaks or mends a human heart, I would have over Pandora the same advantage intellectually that a chess-player would possess who employed an original opening of superior force. He urged me to look at the situation historically, analysing the mainspring of accomplished fact and putting wholly away that muttering in our sleep we call philosophy. "In my own experience," he added, gazing retrospectively out of the open window, "I have made it a point on occasions such as this to grasp the thrill of conscious strength which illumines the drama of life. It is the Italian manner, and results in action as pure and fine as the draped figure of romantic Music. The apples of knowledge are sour, yet I require of you but a single warm-hearted moment, believing as I do that anything can be done in a world where crooked grows faster than straight."

In the days that followed I never saw Pandora Miduvel without speculating upon the attributes our fancy had lent her, and asking myself whether an impress of some remote century might linger in the mind, as the murmur of long-silent waves clings to the ocean shell. Could it be that ripples set in motion by the Ark still send a tremulous impulse across the expanse of things we muse upon? May the consciousness be so supernaturally quickened that a transmitted whisper is distinguishable across the soundless dark of ages?

Once—fallen thus into sun-dreams—I loitered an hour amid the crystal roses, listening to the immortal talking of the river as the moving vision of its fluid panorama splashed and eddied over the water-worn stones.

"I divine your thought," cried Pandora, coming towards me with a smile of magnetic fascination. "You are thinking that the babble of a stream is a changeless voice, speaking for ever with the same meaning." Then absently she added, "When I listen, a fancy brings before me that which I have never seen—*a place of breaking waves.*"

"And have you always lived," I inquired, "in this old-world atmosphere of peace called Bath?"

"Yes, since my uncle died, five years come Twelfth Night. In his prime he was the best wormeater in England."

"Wormeater! . . . ." I repeated.

"One that bores worm-marks in new-made furniture to sell for old. It is an artist's trade—though he loved life as well as art. Look," she continued, leading me to the dining-room, where, on the reverse of a framed cardboard, ornamented with the familiar invocation of a "blessing on our home," the departed wormeater had traced the legend:

Irish Whiskey, English Beef,
A Welsh Rabbit and a Scotch Girl.

"My aunt is not Scotch," added the dark maiden, with ripples of mirth.

At the end of a week Vaini and I had sufficiently reconnoitred our ground, and the next night was appointed when we should sink the treasure-shaft of his invention. Once at the locality on Lansdowne hillside which he identified with the vanished Spring, I had watched him drawing a web of lines and curves and dotted figures so carefully based upon the sun's rays, as to be evidently an astronomical calculation. We were to take our valets with us and station them out of sight of our operations, yet near enough to protect us against surprise. Vaini was unarmed, but I carried a pocket five-chambered Colt, throwing an eight ounce ball thirty paces.

As the night was to be one of fatigue, I resolved to spend the morning strolling at the edge of a forest called Withering Leaves, where in those days grew handfuls of wild flowers. In the early hours, gazing from my window upon the vaporous cloud of pink and yellow blossoms that made the day seem cut in pearl, I had heard Pandora singing with marvellous finesse a popular refrain, a song of rare pathos, and sweet as the melody of waking birds, and now, as the sunshine broadened, what could I do save let my thoughts drift with the song? As I walked it seemed to me the world was filled with such faint sounds as minstrelsy is made of. Once, across the luminous green, a cloud shadow flitted, as though some boding presence, cleaving the sunlight, sped upon vanishing wings. I had reached the crest, and turned to look across grey manor garths upon the Avon, gliding down its smooth pavement towards the city's stair of climbing roofs,

when amid the tufts of meadowsweet and feather hyacinths I observed three twigs laid together in a triangle.

I was scrutinising this familiar gipsy signal, when the sound of voices hurtling through the forest reached me—the shrill defiance of a woman, the angry scolding of a man. Before I could catch more than a few words they issued from the trees.

"I speak for our people; my word is the voice of all," cried the man.

"Hideling," answered the girl, "speak again and I will leave my mark on you broad and deep!"

Then, at sight of me, both were silent. The woman was Pandora Mduvel, and from his face of bronze I took the man to be an English gipsy. He was roughly habited in what his vernacular would have styled "Kersemere kickseys" or breeches, a waistcoat of faded tomato red, a rusty velveteen jacket and cap, and about his neck a "blue billy" kerchief—an ornament in vogue amongst those who devote their leisure to the technique of the poacher's art. In appearance he was a bulldog of the human breed, and I divined that he was one of the Celestial's underlings. He glanced doubtfully towards her, while she stood intently watching me, with lips pursed in a silent whistle. Was she considering whether to set her bulldog upon me? If so, the thought passed, for, motioning him back, she advanced with a salutation of suppressed amusement. She walked as light of foot as a fawn, and carried her sun-browned head like a flower. In her face was the exuberance of country life, and in place of the sweet-apple bloom of an English girl her dusky skin glowed with the fire of Egypt. About her hung a fascination not of the visible world, an impression heightened by the gold coin which dangled and sparkled beside her face. As she approached she laughed with semblance of good humour, yet that little laugh sounded weird as a song-thrush singing in December.

"I wonder at finding you followed by so unsavoury a companion," I said.

"Only buying mushrooms," she answered, showing me a basketful of creamy fungi.

"Perhaps you will tell me, as before, that you were waiting for me and calling my name?"

"I was telling my cousin Kushto Macromengro I will not marry him. When the same thing has been asked and refused a dozen times, what wonder if the voice be raised?"

"Very true. I might have known that those harsh cries could be none other than the accents of a love fed upon bitter herbs. Poor Kushto, he already tastes his cup filled with the lees of other men's revelling."

"Other men's revelling!" she repeated: "that means another man's love" And as we walked she paused with wistful face, wherein some amorous thought gathered, as may hover a fancy of incomparable music about the silent harp, that waits—its strings unsmitten.

"Do you think you would ever grow to care for me?" she asked, with the heedless curiosity of a child.

The oddity of her question recalled the Hebrew declaration, *Man loveth the woman that is a stranger*—a judgment so true that, possessed as I was by a gruesome dread of my new acquaintance, I nevertheless felt within me the power of her charm.

"I have but to look in your face," I answered, "to know that you would prefer me to a hideaway poacher. Something tells me you have a purpose in life—dangerous it may be—who can say!"

"How do you know that?" she asked, with fixed attention.

"I have seen heads like yours on canvas," I replied, "wherein lay a passionate romance with interwoven ambitions and jealousies. Heads of famous people, whereon is the haunted look of unspeakable memories, whose thought is trained to scrutiny of every hour, not knowing what danger the next may bring."

But she scarcely listened, and interrupted me, saying: "Why were you following me, and how did you know I was here?"

"I was looking," I answered, amused at this characteristic inquiry, "for something else than a lovers' quarrel. My companion seeks a spot on the hillside where in ancient days, when people very different from us lived here, a young girl like you was put to death. There were splendid Roman soldiers in those days, as beautiful as the archer-gods of open air. You may still see them, I am told, on moonlight nights, mere shadows in the hedgerows now, and catch the faint command, the bugle echo, the tread of muffled feet; till when they pass the place we seek they turn to jeer upon the girl I spoke of—stripped, whipped, crucified, ... naked and ashamed."

"Why was she stripped and whipped?" asked Pandora.

"Because, though her lips breathed love, her heart was filled with hate. But here we are at Castle Joyous. Come, let us drink a glass of wine together and speak no more of such sad things."

A moment later, we stood in the garden, with a bottle of my Espiritu Santo on the rustic table. "Taste with me," I said: "it is the wine of gold distilled from yellow ingots and double ducats—the enkindling wine that treasure-seekers drink."

Raising her glass, Pandora, with a twitch of the wrist, spilled a few drops, in this quaint usage of modern country folk unconsciously offering a libation to Olympus. Then she tossed the wine off—not in sips, as well-bred women wet their lips, but at a voluptuous swallow.

III.

A few hours later, soon after finishing our midday meal, Professor Vaini became violently ill. When he had been put to bed by his servant, Pandora was unremitting in her inquiries and offers of service. He would have no doctor, being himself an accomplished herbalist, and wrote his own prescription for an antidote. Reflecting upon our simple diet that day, which Mrs. Oldcorn had prepared, I could think of nothing doubtful except the mushrooms Pandora had obtained from Kushto Macromengro. I had not tasted these, and fortunately Vaini had eaten of them sparingly. Upon mentioning to him the hands through which they had passed, he nodded and said, "The touch of those brown hands changed them to toadstools."

The next morning he was better, and I left him in charge of his valet, after shocking Mrs. Oldcorn by telling her of our suspicions. I resolved to seek Kushto Macromengro, and picture to him some of the disagreeable possibilities of life. I had not spent one summer fishing with gipsy guides without learning their ways; and now, in observing at the fringe of the forest a tree marked XX, I knew it for a token of twisted-tail cipher, and doubted not the poacher was near possibly watching me. I pursued my walk listening intently. It was a theory with Vaini that cultivation of the senses refines the mental perception; and by way of sharpening my wits during our residence together in Italy, he had so exercised my hearing, that now across the stillness of Withering Leaves I could perceive the barking of dogs upon the far horizon and hear the tinkle of Bristol church-bells

"As the gipsy came on I fired two shots in instant succession, . . . with the second splitting the cudgel in his hand"

nine miles distant, could catch above me the murmur of unfledged rooks talking in their sleep, and on the Broadwater road, a mile away, distinguish a man's measured tread, a woman's lighter step, and a child's pitapat following after. I soon became conscious of a stealthy footfall, and knew that Pandora's bulldog was at my heels.

Crossing an open glade, I paused at its fringe, and raising a small field-glass which hung at my side, looked over the country. Everyone knows that by holding a field-glass reversed, with the large lens an inch from the eye, and looking not through but upon it, a minute and powerful reflector is obtained. I stood thus a minute, seemingly absorbed in the landscape. Suddenly in the glass I beheld Kushto peeping from the bushes twenty yards behind me. A single instant he stood, gathering himself together, then dashed forward, his short stick ready.

Letting fall the glass, I drew the five-shooter from my pocket and faced about. In those days I was quick as a whip-lash with a revolver, and as the gipsy came on, I fired two shots in instant succession, with the first slicing away the lobe of his right ear, with the second splitting the cudgel in his hand.

"Now open your mouth," I said, as he halted, "and you shall have the other three down your throat."

The ancients deemed the danger and despair of a fighting man the supreme poetic morsel, and might have given a moment to gaze at even the roughest human animal at bay. Kushto stood confronting me, laughing with bravado at what he took to be my poor shooting.

"Fairly takes the cake, sir," he said, producing a cotton handkerchief which he held to his ear. "Lucky for me you are such a bad shot!"

"Mr. Macromengro," I said, "you are coming with me to the Police, where you will answer to a charge of conspiracy to poison, and of attempting a murderous attack."

He stood irresolute, deliberating whether to take the chances of a rush upon me, or to make terms. He chose the latter alternative, and instantly appealed to me to let him go upon easy conditions. "They be so rough at the Pollis," he added, with a grin, "and in all my life I have never been struck with a whip, never been sorry or sick."

"I wish you to answer a few questions," I said. "If I get the truth, you may run for the woods. First, who is Pandora Miduvel?"

"Perhaps one of us; maybe an orphan; says she knows neither father nor mother."

"Where did she come from?"

"Swam ashore. Like all young gentlemen, you think the Rahnee's taken a fancy your way, but she's not: in the end she'll marry me."

"She would marry you if I and my Italian friend were done for?"

"You don't want me to peach on the kid, sir: ask yourself if that would be fair. But she hates the seedy swell that's with you, and she'll wear widow's weeds for no one but me."

"Where did you gather the toadstools she got from you yesterday?"

His mouth quivered, and he stood watching me nervously.

"She has refused to marry you unless, if a good chance offered, such as this just now, you knocked me on the head."

He cast his eyes down and began drawing circles in the dust with the point of his foot.

"Silence pleads guilty. You have given me as good answers as I expected,

and now you may go. But the next time we meet in this wood I shall take better aim, and my word for it . . . . I'll marry Pandora Miduvel."

Midday drew near when I returned to Castle Joyous, to find Vaini better, Pandora at his bedside reading aloud, and Mrs. Oldcorn bringing up a tray furnished with an invalid's repast, "old man's diet" she called it, which I recognised as a goulash of minced beef, with stewed potatoes and onions, and scraps of buttered pork. I persuaded him to drink a little mulled wine, which I heated and spiced myself.

As the hours wore on, I strolled into the garden, meditating my project of a surprise for Vaini—which was to go that night, attended by his servant and mine, to Lansdowne Hill and sink the treasure-drill at the point he had marked with a white pebble. If beneath all this speculation there rested a golden corner stone, I meant to reach it.

It was a tranquil day, one of the rare and splendid days that are remembered when in the brooding silence of October we walk amid the summer's wreckage. It is then we recall the baby leaves unfolding, the perfect boughs uplifted, the long afternoons—soundless, save for redstart chirpings. Such days, and our loves, will seem, at the end, the only things worth cherishing.

To this garden Pandora often came, preening her little plumage, idle and carefree as those proverbial beings that in springtime smile at the winter's frost In the brilliant sunshine her plain gown seemed spun about with films such as the fairies wear—a witchery of amber light and violet shade. From what far bourne had she been severed and brought back into the picture of earthly scenes? At what hidden springs had she tasted the instinct which teaches such strange folk their wisdom? Would she go through life as young as yesterday, yet older than the grey of weather-beaten rocks? I could but feel that to her reasoning Vaini and I were attempting a desecration of the girl-goddess, whose shrine she lived to defend.

There before me, at the end of the rose-walk, where a tiny fountain bubbled into an antique basin which might have seen the hyacinths bloom in Aquæ Sulis, stood Pandora, trellising a vine.

"This garden is like you, Pandora," I said—"sun-kissed and wild."

"The fine gentleman who made it," she answered gravely, "might not thank you. Years ago I heard say he was some wise man, like the seedy swell upstairs. His garden was to be no mere patchwork of walks and borders, but should speak a meaning. In the sunlight he set clusters of brilliant roses, and under this trellis great banks of violets which seek the shade, . . . so in the two, placed thus, he read the sunshine and shadow of life . . . and of love."

"Love!" I whispered: "to think that you should speak that word to me."

The day was ending, its crimson fading to sapphire in the dark. The Cathedral vesper filled the air, and a lurid sunset, gleaming through the pines, lathed the yellow elders in luminous sheen. Behind us, great lilac bushes were heaped with tints of Tyrian purple; and listening to the trickling fountain, I knew the hour held its way in music. If ever I were to act upon Vaini's wish and seek to lure the brown girl from his circle, now was the time!

"It is true, then," I said, "that every garden fountain has its nymph, and that I have found her under this evening's sky."

She listened with a look of fixed aversion, and answered, "It is Kushto Macromengro that you found to day."

"Yes," I assented unconcernedly; "better so than that he found me . . . . unprepared. So he has been for fresh orders?"

"He has not been here," she replied. "If I know what happens, it is for the same reason that the lightest vapour casts its tell-tale shadow. Shoes marked with the clay of Withering Leaves, and on your table a revolver with two empty chambers. . . . . Have you killed him?"

"Far worse. I told him I shall marry you."

An angry flush suffused her face, and I could scarce suppress a smile at thus rousing the devil. "I sometimes think," I added, hoping to pique her to an unguarded word, "that you gaze on many shapes I cannot see. It would not surprise me that you behold the forgotten things of my life, or that you should tell me they are best worth my remembering Now, if it be true that fate lies in the hollow of a hand, put both your hands in mine and I will tell you what dwells in the mind of the gods—and of a woman."

"Nay, tell it to yourself," she answered—"you that spend a summer blowing upon dead coals. You are not the first that has been here measuring and digging and setting odd marks in the ground." Then, with sudden exaltation, she added, "If you would know where springs the oozing from the earth so many have sought, come with me the first dark night, and I will show you that treasure of your life you grope after alone in vain!"

Beneath the sunset her eyes were deep as her ominous words. I remembered with a shudder how Ormès and Almodoro were taken to find the treasure of their lives and left for dead. But after a moment's seeming reflection, I answered, "To-night I dare not leave my friend, but to-morrow night at eleven you and I will meet where we now stand, and we will wander away so far together that all the rest of life may not suffice to bring us back."

That same night, when eleven struck, Vaini was asleep, Mrs. Oldcorn and Pandora had retired to their rooms; and carrying my shoes in one hand and the treasure-drill in the other, I went softly downstairs in my slippers. The two valets awaited me, and we were soon well on our way to Lansdowne Hill I laughed aloud to think I had stolen a march upon the girl-goddess. Bathonians keep early hours, and we met no one, nor were lights visible in the houses. Once only, in the distance, a gleam flashed, as though an eye opened upon the horizon. There was no sound, save the thin whisper of the night. A mile away spread the black shape of Withering Leaves, and overhead were the stars and rising crescent the Flamens and sentinels of Aquæ Sulis knew.

I had resolved to remain the shortest possible time exposed to accident, and my dispositions were instantly made. I stationed one of the men at the roadside, and the second forty yards in the other direction, facing the only house in that neighbourhood They were to stand with their backs to me, to be keenly on the alert, and to give warning of the approach of man or woman. After his discomfiture of the morning, I did not anticipate that Kushto Macromengro would be very enterprising, and with Pandora Miduvel asleep, there seemed small likelihood of interruption.

I had thoroughly tested Vaini's invention beforehand. At each fifteen inches insertion into the ground, it was to be withdrawn, and emptied of the handfuls of earth thus extracted. I fell to work vigorously, plunging the tube into the gravel by means of its revolving handle, emptying it and beginning anew My excitement may be conceived, when at a depth of five feet I felt its drill grinding

"'Now, if it be true that fate lies in the hollow of a hand, put both your hands in mine."

against a hard substance. Upon carefully withdrawing it and running the earth through my fingers I found three coins, at the cold touch of which I could have shouted for joy—for the secret so long and tragically guarded was revealed, and the Celestial Virgin's treasure was ours! I pocketed them, strapped the treasure-drill over my shoulder and was refilling the opening I had made with loose earth at my feet, when my servant came running back from the roadside in a tremble. I drew my revolver, and we stood side by side. He was too frightened to mutter more than that something had run noiselessly past him, flickering in the starlight. I advanced a few steps, peering into the darkness, but although the moon was rising, discovered no more than that the velvet footed mist gathered its phantom shadows.

"I found three coins."

Suddenly from behind came a cry, and the sound of a falling body. We hastened back to Vaini's servant, whom we lifted half unconscious, his face streaming with blood. Between us, we helped him to the roadside, where I gave both men some brandy from my flask. Not more than twenty minutes had elapsed since we came—yet to me it seemed longer than the night. As soon as the injured man had bound up his wound with my handkerchief, and could walk, we made our retreat down the hill. He was obliged to halt several times to stanch the flow of blood, and in one of these intervals told me with some difficulty for his hurt had included the breaking of his front teeth—that he had seen nothing, but that from the darkness a stone, the size of a man's fist, had been hurled with the force of a catapult, and had felled him to the ground.

I was in a state of nervous tension when, unlocking the front door of Castle Joyous with a passkey, I perceived from the lights and tread of feet that something unusual to the repose of the house had happened. Not till afterwards did I learn that an alarming noise had awakened the maids who slept above Pandora, and that Vaini and Mrs. Oldcorn in their rooms were startled by the frantic cries of one struggling with a nightmare . . . "Keep him away—drive him back—don't let him dig in the ground!"

Now she had issued forth to the head of the stair I was ascending, and I beheld her, a silvery figure in the half-light, gazing upon me with the tumult of a meteoric passion. For a breathless instant it seemed that, through her disarray, I beheld Pandora transfigured to a being statuesque and heroic, whose shrine I had profaned. The moonlight became clearer, and I paused motionless, listening to the harping of the breeze. In that weird instant I knew that an unknown presence had come with the virgin feet of the day, motioning me back from the precincts of a vanished world.

Then the supernatural faded, and the human Pandora fell upon a chair and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

IV.

At an early hour on the following morning I made a full report to Vaini, still resting on what had been his bed of pain, and placed in his eager hands the three coins that had come to light. Two are gold, one bearing the effigy of the dated

"I beheld her, a silvery figure in the half-light, gazing upon me with the tumult of a meteoric passion."

Julius Cæsar, perhaps struck in the first year of Octavian, the second showing a head of Agrippina. The third, when freed of dirt and polished, proved to be a piece of great rarity, imprint with artistic grace—a silver Tetradrachm of Metapontum.

At midday I was sitting in the little parlour adjoining the dining-room, when, to my astonishment, Pandora entered with outstretched hands and a radiant smile revealing a flash of white teeth.

"Forgive me," she said, "my mannerless folly last night. It was a bad dream that drugged me, and you, who have the habit of sun-dreams, will bear with mine!"

I observed intently this play of oddity and emotion, remembering my tutor's caution that life might depend upon detecting the undercurrent of this strange creature's thought. Was it her nature to pass thus from day to night, from night to day, without either dawn or twilight? Stamped upon her face, beyond all weeping and wailing, was indeed the footprint of a violent grief The bloom of her youthful beauty had faded in an hour, as a woman's face changes amid sudden sorrow and anxiety. Behind this outburst of good will was that composed self-mastery with which the great felines regard an imminent danger. In her eyes lay the mystery of a cloud-covered sea. Was it that I but saw in them my own reflected misgiving, or did I discern behind their lustre a cold and deathless hate?

I took her hands and playfully caressed them.

"We will leave our dreams," I said, with half-conscious irony: "you your nightmare and I my wasted reveries. Some day let us seek together a beautiful far country where the only dream will be that Love is for ever."

As she listened, her eyes were raised towards the leaded window-panes glinting in the summer sunlight, and I saw that they were moistened with tears, and marvelled that my careless word had struck so deep. She left me abruptly, and presently I heard her singing in the adjoining dining room. I heard, too, the uncorking of a bottle—a sound that excited my curiosity, for Pandora never deigned concern herself with household matters. Then her step traversed the hall, and I went into the dining-room to find that, of three or four bottles standing on the dresser, she had drawn the cork of one and placed it invitingly on the table at my chair. The luncheon hour drew near, and before my plate was a dish of yesterday's capon, a favourite refreshment with Mrs. Oldcorn, the broken meat being stripped from the bone and with fragments of a neat's tongue, buried in brown jelly. It was flanked by a plate of dandelion salad with its red splash of tomato. The Professor's luncheon was to be served him in bed. I felt a strong repugnance to drinking the wine Pandora had made ready. There are nervous instants when we yield to the weakness of thinking that to do a certain thing will be unlucky, and to such an impulse I yielded in replacing that bottle, recorked, on the sideboard.

In the act of doing so I heard the muffled footstep of a man in my bedroom overhead. My servant had gone into town, and I opened the hall door slightly and waited. Noiselessly down the stair came a furtive tread, till, stepping forth, I confronted Kushto Macromengro. Without evincing surprise at his presence, I drew him into the dining room, and said it had been my intention to visit Withering Leaves again some day to show I bore no grudge. I inquired after his damaged ear, and reminding him that the following day was Sunday, declared I would give him five shillings to buy beer and tobacco. Affecting to find no money in my pockets, I vowed with a chuckle he should taste sherry from my private stock, and placed in his hands the bottle of Pandora's choice.

"You shall drink deep as brandy Nan!" I said, slapping him on the shoulder; "but meanwhile hide this wine in some capacious pocket and make for the woods by the garden gate."

It struck me the rascal was in haste to be gone, as, with merely a nod, he strode past and was out of sight.

I immediately went to my room, and there made a discovery which caused me an emotion. On the floor, resting against the wooden partition which divided Vaini's room from mine, and against which stood his bed, was a box filled with gunpowder and bullets. A lighted fuse trailed on the floor, of such length that an hour must have elapsed—the hour when I would have been regaling myself with yesterday's capon and sherry—before the explosion. My companion, in his bed, would have been riddled with bullets, or, as Almodoro phrased it of Ormès, "smitten with the club of Hercules." I summoned Vaini to come and see for himself to what his scheming led. For once he betrayed strong excitement, and I heard his quivering lips mutter, "*Razza di Cane!*"

I seized the moment to inform him that, in view of the gravity our adventure had assumed, it must cease at once, adding my intention to take that evening's train for London, and that our mutual safety required that he also relinquish the search and come with me. My reasons for letting fall again that thick veil our efforts had so nearly lifted were expressed with no little pungency, and I summed them in a favourite dictum of my former fellow-student Mr. Orion Marblehead:

"It is not safe to spend too much time monkeying with Hell."

My instructor in the curious arts yielded with a bad grace, and, still trembling to his knees, gave way before his inability to proceed alone. In the course of that evening's journey he assured me seventeen times that the miscarriage of his hopes was wholly due to my maladroitness, and repeatedly declared that in failing to entice Pandora's affections, I had missed the opportunity of my life.

"Only to think," he ejaculated, "that I was on the point of scaling the unclimbable mountains! . . . . And now what have I to show except a set of false teeth for Pasquale?" Once or twice before, in other matters, he had censured my imperfect range of vision when scanning the perspective of bygone centuries; but now, for the only time in our long acquaintance, he displayed an extreme irritability, and for nearly a year our friendly relations suffered a chill.

Having extinguished the fuse, I rushed downstairs in pursuit of Pandora, but, needless to say, she was not to be found. Mrs. Oldcorn returned from the girl's room declaring that she had taken her bonnet and shawl and gone over the bend of the world, adding that young women now-a-days are "not good for anythink," and that this particular specimen was "only black rubbage."

"But she is your niece," I cried, a new light breaking.

The hasty explanation was made that Pandora Miduvel was nowise her relative, but a waif rescued and educated by the late wormeater, for reasons best known to himself.

In London a week later I received a letter from Mrs. Oldcorn, saying that Pandora had returned to her wild life. Doubtless the dark beauty had merely withdrawn to another coign of vantage. She added that in a glen at Withering Leaves where Kushto had a shelter, his body had been found before the ashes of a camp-fire, over which still hung a kettle containing a bit of bacon and a couple of duck's eggs. He had lain thus for several days, bent backward in the distortion of strychnine poisoning, and near him rested an empty bottle labelled *Espiritu Santo.*

Ten years later, in May 1885, passing a month in London, I was invited by a medical acquaintance to visit with him Bethlehem Hospital, popularly called Bedlam, where was his professional service. At the end of an hour's inspection of various wards, each having its grade of insanity, we passed into a garden, within high walls, where in pleasant weather the more tractable madcaps were

allowed to walk. It being their dinner-hour, the place was deserted, save by a little old swarthy woman, who turned her wrinkled visage and passionate eyes towards me in a careless glance.

My guide, noticing the intentness with which I observed her, murmured, "One of our oddest patients: I know not her name, nor her story, nor whence she comes. She speaks of herself as *Pandy*, and is usually quiet, as you see her. Only at intervals, once in two or three months, she bursts into a paroxysm of tremendous fury. We always know when to prepare for these fits. An hour before the spasm, she begins a hoarse muttering, ever more rapid, and ending in demoniac yells: ". . . Keep him away . . . Drive him back . . . Don't let him dig in the ground!"

In 1900 I returned, weather-beaten and frost-crumbled, to Bath, to drink its waters. I go there now each November, and often pass the places Vaini and I knew together. Castle Joyous has disappeared, and amid new furrows and turnip fields I can only conjecture the forest fringe which Kushto Macromengro frequented.

The drifted leaves lie heaped above that buried Summer, and to my eyes the familiar poplars cast a longer and sadder shade. The walk through Withering Leaves still keeps its fragrant charm, and in the turquoise dusk of distance the hills gleam with poetic beauty. I look upon the Avon and listen to its song of myriad meaning, and beneath its calm behold the prism wherein my youthful gaze divined such marvels. Upon its surface at night I see the Milky Way reflected and know that this starlight tracery upon the water is the Celestial Virgin's dustless path.

In the hush of these my twilight days I remember Pandora, and think how our brief meeting burnt a mark in my life. Whence came this fierce girl who "swam ashore," and whose prescience demolished our endeavour? Was the legend of the goddess of Aquæ Sulis known to her, and was she filled with the fire of a powerful purpose which, when accomplished, left her life empty? Was no frail germ of feminine tenderness enfolded within the harsh discords whereby alone I knew her? How fantastic in the retrospect is this ill-omened example of Vaini's art—the gate of another world half-opened, our goal no further than Yesterday from To-morrow. Within, we see the crystal roses and hear the rippling river, with its whisper whereof music is made. We gaze upon Aquæ Sulis, and hear the deathless bugles of a Roman Legion. Above their faint reverberation rises an ever-deepening note of tragedy. Then, as though the Fates played with loaded dice, the maiden-dawn changes to flame. And, remembering these things, I linger before the insoluble question—within the folds and windings of that Shadow-land we ponder, may it be that the survival of some bygone age still whispers the living Present?

Occasionally my field-path rambles lead across Lansdowne Hill. I pause to look upon the spot where in the stillness of a summer midnight I sank Vaini's treasure-drill into the ground. The antique coins then recovered are before me, witnesses to the accuracy with which he calculated the position of the ton of gold there buried. But I never feel the wish to probe for it again. Better than any one now living I understand that in defence of her own the Celestial Virgin is a tigress at bay. I have no desire to evoke afresh that demon of tears and hate. For well I know that at the slightest menace a spectral arm would be outstretched as before. At the first step I should recoil before the consciousness of an arresting presence, sprung suddenly into being behind me, and turning, should behold again a tawny girl of rare beauty regarding me in silent menace with the sweet and implacable smile I remember.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

THE GOLDEN MIST STONE

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THE LAST OF THE TENTH LEGION.

IT was to his Villa Sirena, at Sorrento, amid its interbraiding shine and dark, that Vaini summoned me, in May 1895, for a psychical experiment as to

"She was clad in a seamless pink tunic that fell to the knees, draping the figure it revealed—a figure beautiful as that of Diana whom the Ephesians loved."

which he wrote, "The door of classic life will be wide open before us." I had spent a few weeks in Naples aiding him in unrolling a dozen Herculanean manuscripts, and was thus within easy reach. Our correspondence during the

preceding twelve months had enabled me to follow those tendencies which continually drew him to realms of speculative thought. I knew with what delight he mused upon the imagery of bygone times, and perceived that within his mind had kindled an ambition to discover the mystical links and mainsprings between modern and ancient days. During the earlier years he had caught some of the finer phantasies and made them real, and he was now ardent to stand within some reanimated precinct of the antique world. He seemed drawn to what proved the most living of all our experiments by a force akin to the magnetic attraction of great gems: and now, in tracing this summary of an afternoon spent beyond that "wide-open door," I realise afresh that there are experiences which give meaning to all the rest of life, and in reviewing this fugitive recital I note with satisfaction that it bears the impress of Truth,—that everlasting hall-mark which is not to be effaced.

I found the Professor in his orange grove pruning and watering his favourite trees. His brown eyes were soft with dreaming, and, as though putting the last accent to some train of far-borne meditation, he greeted me with the words, "The result rests on the knees of the gods." I took in the familiar scene at a glance—the Villa overhanging the sapphire sea, the Monastery green-curtained amid its myrtles, Vesuvius ten miles distant across the sparkling brilliance of the Bay of Naples. About us spread a delightful privacy of shade that lured the fancy, and over all rested that peace of Nature which is as divine as the wise silence of Olympus. I delighted in its over-wood of orange boughs, its undergrowth of jasmine and oleander, and beneath these a fine texture of mosses and wild strawberry leaves and violets. Chiefly my gaze rested upon a tall lady lilac bush, a luminous pink shrub, whereon the Italian sunshine streamed its witchery of opalescent hues. I doubt not the juices of that tree are the love-blood whereof poets write. In the warm stillness its branches bent in the light breeze and thrilled the air with meaning. I thought it splendid as a beautiful woman, and was absorbed in the jewelled spray of fancies it suggested when Vaini cut short my reverie.

"Here," said he, laying his hand upon my shoulder, and pointing to the lustrous foliage, "here is the place of my soul."

Our vegetarian luncheon finished, he explained the fine-spun theory round which his studies hovered. In removing a foundation wall of Roman origin, his workmen had brought to light a thin section of crimson onyx, richly veined, which he had recognised to be a Golden Mist Stone. On each side was drawn an ellipse, about which were grouped signs of the Zodiac and points that evidently marked the position of astronomical bodies.

"Dear Master," I interrupted, after a summary inspection of this object, "what is a Golden Mist Stone?"

"I am vexed," he answered, with pained surprise, "to hear you ask elementary questions, after all the years I have led you through hidden ways towards the unfamiliar side of things. We have to do with the electric force of that Golden Mist commonly called the Nebular hypothesis, and this stone is a tangible expression of that crown of roseate light we see forming and fading. Upon it has been traced a planetary conjunction which is its key through ages back and centuries to come. For several months I have been absorbed in the astounding properties of this fragment. I will not pause to explain their application at this moment, since their trial must be made to-morrow. My colleague in Berlin fixes the original date as A.D. 294, which was in the reign of Diocletian. This identical conjunction is present now for the first time since August 1793, and will not occur again for a hundred and twenty-eight years. I have made the necessary

preparation, and after its black crystal bath the stone is to be held in the light to-morrow precisely at noon."

"I divine your thought," I observed: "that herein exists some soul-wrought chain between ourselves and remote periods."

"You have read rightly," answered Vaini, with a kindling glance. "In this petrifaction I detect truths startling in their novelty and power, yet definite and certain as that beneath the chill of frozen winter hide the promise and buds of spring. I have often shown you that intellectual landmarks are sometimes most useful when they point to disillusions: now, at last, in the evening of my days, it is mine to fix the theory of mystical perspective."

"You really believe that under these conditions it will be possible to behold . . ."

"Nay, I have already beheld that which made me catch my breath. The bones of the old world sometimes lie very near the surface. It was three days ago, a trifle too soon astronomically, and I had not properly charged the black crystal bath. Nevertheless I touched the fringe of that we are in search of. To my joy, the outline of this villa faded, and in its place appeared a semblance of some wholly different building. I even saw a falcon-faced fellow, who gazed at me with affright."

"Was he a Roman?" I interrupted.

"Here is a trace of him," the Maestro answered. "A dust portrait, fixed upon the Mist Stone itself by the method you and I have practised together."

Taking the onyx from my tutor's hand, I peered intently into its depth, till a figure emerged from a blurred background. It was an undersized, swarthy old man, habited in short-sleeved tunic, standing with a hand upon either hip and laughing noiselessly to himself. I could see his aged and minutely wrinkled face and the yellow gleam in his hard black eyes. At a glance I knew that rock-hewn facial type to be Roman. His left shoulder was slightly depressed, as though by a lifelong burden. Suddenly he discovered me, and in terror his jaws began working silently with feverish haste. I remember thinking that he had thus become a doleful caricature of all humanity's sorrow. Then, swiftly and unaccountably as the image had come, it vanished.

"Place yourself twenty years back," Vaini exclaimed, with the masterful emphasis I knew so well, "in any dramatic scene whereof you retain a clear impression. Close your eyes and picture intently what happened: the semblance of that day will still be vivid—you will behold its imagery and incidents, and the people who came and went will appear as real as you and I are now. So will it be if this talisman disclose its secret. I will not waste time reminding you of the reality of the unseen, for it is as evident as is the evanescence of all reality. It is beyond me to anticipate the precise forces which may rest within this fragment, but we are likely to find them as living as the volition which turns a climbing vine aside from the smooth wall to the nails whereon it fastens its tendrils. We should behold the panorama it bears and listen to words spoken centuries ago. We may learn how it was first charged with supernatural force, for its use is as ancient as the magic ivories."

My acquaintance with Vaini, whom I remember, now that he is no more, as the most fascinating and baffling of men, had familiarised me with that tonic of emotion, which he justly declared to be an incomparable stimulant. His projects were never wanting in proportion and continuity. One of his most admirable demonstrations had been made that winter, wherein, roving at random through the animal world, he established by inference from actual experiment that animals astray upon their humble path of life consult instinctively with one another and

receive a friend's advice. In the essay to which he had summoned me, he probably felt too sure of himself to doubt his pupil. But it was in the full consciousness of my own imperfect capacity to supplement his pursuit of intellectual wild flowers that I answered, "Professor, will you tell me exactly my share in this adventure?"

Vaini's manner always took on a heightened charm in presence of danger. An artist at close quarters with a technical and critical problem is intensely human. His voice now sank to that confidential whisper Italians cherish, as he glanced about to assure himself no eavesdroppers lurked. "Carissimo," he answered, "you will keep your hand not on the pulse but on the heart. We may find ourselves confronted by a peril so extraordinary that it will be unique in the history of mankind. We are about to tread the dust of Roman days. What shall we find there, if not men and women as living as ourselves? Who can say that to them it may not be we that shall seem visionary—that to us they may not prove a fateful reality!"

"How," I asked, "when we have entered upon that bygone age, are we to return to the Nineteenth Century?"

"If dipped in fresh water," replied Vaini, "the negative effect of the stone should come into being. The world of Diocletian will fade, and we shall again be standing in this garden. But, mark you, there is a dreadful possibility."

"Which is," I murmured as my companion paused, watching me intently, "that the Mist Stone may be taken from us."

"Precisely. If the worst happens, and we are imperilled, we must instantly join hands, and I will cast the talisman into the nearest water."

On the following day the clock marked twelve as, after a morning spent in preparation, we began our experiment. For the first time in my lifelong acquaintance with Vaini he betrayed great nervous excitement, and the hand that held the uplifted onyx trembled in the sunlight. Before us the Bay of Naples seemed a pavement of lazuli flecked with whitecaps and seamed with glistening aquamarine. I gazed an instant upon that shadow-haunted floor, whereon the sunshine and the breeze traced a silhouette that looked like Love's bent bow. I beheld the foam of waves breaking into lace along the shore. Beneath us, where the sapphire paled to emerald, an Italian felucca lay anchored. Suddenly I observed that its half-furled sails were changing to garnet red, and at the same instant I felt a phosphorescent glow rising about me, and perceived a smell like burning sandal-wood. The faintness of an overpowering emotion obscured my senses, and I heard no more the whisper of the sea. Before me appeared a Pompeian portico, pearl-white and crimson like a seashell's lining. Vaini's orange grove melted into tamarind and oleander. Amid the trees stood two marble statues, slightly tinted—Aphrodite, singer of songs, and Pallas the torch-bearer. It was no more the half-light of illusion. . . . Vaini and I had crossed the impalpable dividing line, and moved backward seventeen centuries.

I was looking at a vixen chained to a column, with a litter of cubs running loose about her, all of them making efforts to reach a scarlet-headed, green-backed woodpecker that hung in a cage, when my attention was diverted to the little old man whose dust portrait my tutor had taken. He wore the same short tunic, about his neck was a metal collar, and I noticed that his right ear had been bitten away. He did not at first perceive us, and fancying himself alone with a great hound that stood gazing good-naturedly at the young foxes, raised a wineskin, and refreshed himself with a gurgling draught. Suddenly

he beheld us, and tying the neck of his pigskin bottle, stared at Vatni with frightened eyes, and said in Latin, "Good luck to you. *Salutem!* May you sneeze pleasantly!"

I have spoken of the lady lilac bush which to this day stands at the angle of the Villa, and whose pink foliage was now the last to fade. Its flesh tint,

"She was playing ball, tossing it over her shoulder, and in the runs and turns of that leisurely movement kept time with the music, dancing a measure that might have been spun in the wildwood."

suddenly catching a richer colour, melted into the figure of a young woman, as though the tree were transforming itself to human form. Her face was fine and resolute, and at the instant not quite revealed, nor yet all hidden—she seemed the poem one never forgets.

She was clad in a seamless pink tunic that fell to the knees, draping the figure it revealed—a figure beautiful as that of Diana whom the Ephesians loved.

Her hair was fastened at the back with a tiny arrow, and I remember smiling at my thought that its rose-flushed golden splendour is called in France *soleil couchant*. From within the building came the sound of a double-octaved harp, such as the Egyptians knew, played very slowly, and as she listened to its vibrant notes, her statuesque arms were carelessly touching the soundless strings of an imaginary instrument. The music was a lyric of dreams,—of the mating of those phantom shapes wherewith the ancients peopled their world; of flowers, and the secret of dawn, and the murmur of awakening woods.

Then with a cry of surprise she beheld us, and ejaculating words I distinguished imperfectly, came forward with eyes fixed upon the onyx Vaini held.

II.

Her voice brought two men from the interior of the building, who halted at sight of us. One was a lean, elderly individual, pausing with grey head tilted eagerly forward. His mouth was bent awry and twitching, revealing three or four broad yellow front teeth; and as he stood moistening his lips, it was easy to see that in his bewilderment he knew not to which of the gods to offer himself. The other was a young man of effeminate appearance. His handsome face was insignificant, clean shaven but for a small moustache, and his cheeks were slightly rouged. It was a face which, although immature, was grooved with lines that told of furious living. About him hovered a fragrance of cosmetics and spiced wine.

The girl turned towards us with a smothered titter, crying in Latin, "Come, father, look upon them; there is no danger. Decius, come. I wonder what language they speak—what nation wears such ugly garments! Januarius, do not stand gaping, but bring a skin of wine; the younger barbarian looks pale: see, father, it is our Mist Stone they have found and brought back."

I observed the girl attentively, and listened to the name *Puteolana*, by which the men addressed her, and which could have reference only to her birthplace, Puteoli. She moved with athletic grace, as unembarrassed in her light attire as a faun would have been in his. I gazed upon the shell-heart pink of her skin, the straight eyebrows almost meeting, the rose-leaf lips curving in laughter, and read in her face the languorous poetry of an indolent life. At her summons her companions advanced, and the elder, speaking with droll earnestness, said to us:

"My name is Appian; this is my daughter Cythera; my vocation is to cast a thread from the familiar to the unknown. Am I not an Augur? *Salve!* I wish you joy. To speak with a welcome guest is better than broaching a wine-cask. It is distinctly before me that something is about to happen—that it is brought about by our recovered talisman—that to us, as to you, this day will almost seem real."

I listened to these phrases, spoken in the purest Latin, with a consciousness that by the strangest crook of my tutor's craft he and I had been translated to that visionary land of fine light and subtle dusk we call classical. I caught the meaning of what was said with tolerable readiness, albeit my verbs had grown rusty since the gerund-grinding days of thirty years before. In the conversation that followed I was occasionally forced to use Italian, now and then a phrase of Greek; more than once I was wholly at a loss.

He who announced himself an Augur, lifting his eyes in a careless sweep of the heavens, now clapped his hands for dinner, as was doubtless his noonday habit. The hunchback Januarius, who had been standing watchful and doglike in the shadow—a shadow that seemed to me the gathered dark of ages—adjusted

a curtain drawn half way down the atrium as we entered. At that moment Vaini thoughtlessly produced a silk pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose, an action that excited the wonder and amusement of the Romans, as did the novelty of our pockets. While his hands were occupied I seized the opportunity to relieve him of the magical onyx, thinking I might presently have grievous need of it.

Before us was an encrusted table spread with a silver service. Near it were sculptured lounges heaped with cushions. I noticed the goldfish in the impluvium, the hanging fourfold candelabra, the crystal flagons and glazed amphoræ. Against the wall stood a diminutive altar whereon reddened a flame of burning apple-wood. The master of the house sprinkled it with wine, the Roman world even in its decadence preserving the ancient veneration of its ancestors.

"You might think those kindling twigs," murmured Decius, carelessly cracking a nut, "yet, if you look closer, they are only uncertain certainties, grown quite brittle now, and half a dozen promises that failed,—look with what iridescent blues and greens they burn!"

Two girls, waiting to serve us, stood motionless against the triclinium wall. At the sight I realised, as never before, that life, however filled with the glory of nature, seeks its finest inspiration in the form of woman. Near by was the Egyptian harp which one of them was touching as the lilac tree faded. Decius seated himself, and in reply to my inquiry informed me that what I had heard was a hymn to Dionysos, adding, with an irreverent laugh, that within it was hidden some such phrase as the Immortals wove treading the winepress.

"They are Spartan slaves," he added, with a scrutinising glance at the maidens: "full-blooded animals of many moods, fervent and flushed after their meat soup—looking their best when reposing on the grass, a drowsy heap of muscular pink flesh." These words reached the ears of one of them, for she turned aside with tremulous lips. At this token of weakness Decius laughed aloud. "A beautiful woman's anguish is a morsel for the gods," he whispered, dipping his finger-tips in a bowl half-filled with some spiced liquid set apart for his own use. The rest of us moistened our hands in beryl water while the wine was poured. No two cups were alike, Vaini's being a silver goblet, Cythera's a crystal chalice, and mine a deep saucer of mother-of-pearl. Excitement had made me so thirsty that I emptied it at a draught.

After boiled eggs and the roe of a lamprey, a ramshead pasty was set before us, which Decius, with a sarcastic nod towards our host, called Shepherd's pie. This name in connection with Appian afforded him much amusement, and seeing me puzzled, he added, "If we told one another the truth, who would not wish to die!"

"My cook is Sicilian," remarked Appian, splitting an egg. "Let me recommend that chicken—it is tender as a lover's glance. If," said he, turning to Vaini, "you wish to buy a villa, I will sell you this for a paltry four hundred thousand sesterces, and you may take the Spartan girls and my cook at cost. You could find no better point from which to observe the fire-shot line of yonder smoky mountain. And yet," he added, with a twinkle of the eye, "I cannot rid myself of the thought that all we now behold is a mutual hallucination. Am not I a reader of dreams?"

The repast ended with a dish of truffles stewed in cider, followed by cheese-cakes and African honey. With muttered ejaculations to the gods, Appian laid a rose upon the altar, saying, "Now that I am old, what is left me save the wild rose of my youth? Ahime! how quick doth the cut laurel fade!"

Decius watched him with a contemptuous smile, and turning to me murmured, "How must Cupid laugh as he wings his arrows, till like Appian he groans to find them broken!"

"Or rather," retorted Appian, turning angrily upon him, "how often Cupid never wakes till Psyche kisses him good-bye! Young lovers, now-a-days, are not what they were."

We returned to the atrium, whence beyond the lustre of the pines I gazed seaward, and beheld with emotion the surf and sunshine of a bygone age. It was more wonderful to look upon than a newly discovered star. I ventured to ask Puteolana if I might see the peristyle I doubted not extended beyond the triclinium; and when we reached its portal I halted, arrested by the most marvellous sight it has ever been my fortune to behold. Before me opened an enclosure filled with flaming red and yellow poppies. Beneath the tasselled knitting of vines were frescoes rich as the colour of words. On a border of turf sat one of the Spartan girls, breathing into a flute such piping as the vesper sparrow's song a broken note of things once beautiful. She seemed the heart of Greece brooding remembered melody. The other paced to and fro lightfoot as the nymph that vanished before her pursuer. She was playing ball, tossing it over her shoulder, and in the runs and turns of that leisurely movement kept time with the music, dancing a measure that might have been spun in the wildwood. Beside her on the greensward glided her shadow—and to this day I hear the faint reverberance of their sandalled feet. Suddenly she paused at a fountain wherein the water trickled, and drank from her curving hands.

Cythera grew impatient at my delay before what to her was commonplace. Her attitude was that of one who waits a signal, and it flashed upon me that she had waited thus for ages.

"You have come at last," she ejaculated, "after keeping me watching . . . how long! . . . . . knowing all the while that some day some one would find our Mist Stone, and that Mercury would whisper in his ear. You might have guessed, even though you could not count the years."

"How was it lost?" I asked.

"A year ago I was betrothed to Enceladus—you have heard the name of the Centurion who slew the Imperator Carus. Last summer he went with the Tenth Legion into a distant land. It was my father's wish that I should marry him, and I could only obtain that an oracle should speak."

The Greek girls were standing near, listening so intently that the animal nature which looked from their statuesque faces was quelled. Cythera motioned me to the end of the garden, and added, with a laugh at which the crimson woodpecker lifted its wings and turned its head askance, "Our answer, written in characters you might have mistaken for mine, declared I should be his who came with the Mist Stone in his hand. Appian was so angered that he flung it into yonder well."

"And Enceladus?"

"The Tenth Legion has been overwhelmed and destroyed. Enceladus was a brave man; many months' silence followed; no doubt he perished. I shall never again hear that funeral march he loved But we waste words. Such an opportunity comes not twice,—let us away!"

"It seems," I answered, scarce able to repress a smile at my predicament, "that it is I who have fulfilled the oracle. And now—away whither?"

"Whither you will, so it be far from Decius."

"What then to you," I ventured to ask, "is Decius?"

"Alas! I am to marry him. Oh, you who have the talisman, the latchkey to every soul, show me a way of escape."

"Twice betrothed," I exclaimed, "and both times unwillingly!"

"It was but natural," replied the girl, "that Decius should take the place of Enceladus,—is he not his son? Yet rotten grain makes poor bread. As for the other, who cares now the manner of man he was! I shall never again come, tame to his whistle. "I hate soldiers and fighting men and their heavy-handed ways."

I stood before Cythera, listening to the crickets trilling in the grass. I divined in her the Roman nature, tender, passionate and sensuous. Her hand was upon mine, and a beautiful woman's touch is always a caress. Some such careless pressure often draws a man and woman instinctively to one another; and conscious at that moment of the link of a masterful attraction, I remembered the "curious knot" which Circe taught Odysseus. It was a hand firm and strong to send the discus whirling. I looked upon her hair, turned ruddy in the sun-blaze, and beneath that sleeveless tunic divined the contour of a splendid body. I gazed into the flame of those intense eyes—and that instant's swift remembrance of my duty to Vaini remains to this day the splinter of an arrow in my heart.

We were standing at the cliff-side; and pointing to the Italian felucca, which in keeping with the rest had changed to a Roman galley, she added: "Yonder is the ship we call *To-Day*. It must presently pass the horizon and be in sight of coasts beyond the Herculanean pillars. Let us hasten to those dream fields beyond the sunburnt West and be happy. We will turn upon Fate as Diana turned upon Actæon. Be not ungrateful. Is it so stern a lot for a stranger, lost in the unknown, to find one like me awaiting? Come, I will give you a fine white tunic, one of my own, and we will cast these hideous garments into the sea."

She paused, and the deep-spoken word, the immortal word, trembled in the silence—a silence as hushed as the breathless instant that falls between prayers. With an effort I controlled my emotion, and answered, "The onyx is not mine, but another's, and how can I betray his trust!"

She moved away at this ungracious reply, and pointing to the cloud-shadows flitting over the sea, "The things we wish, yet do not wholly understand," she exclaimed, "are there written, fine as the Sibylline meaning of October leaves. Who does not divine behind them the phantoms that gaze on us and beckon ere they fly? At this moment all the birds in the world are singing, yet something whispers me that this meeting is only for an hour—that I no longer belong here . . . that I must go."

At the word Appian, followed by his slave Januarius, hurried into the peristyle. Their faces had blanched, and they were talking excitedly, the dwarf crying:

"I warned you, Master, it is a grievous sign when the flame grows cold."

"It was but yesterday," moaned the Augur, "I touched an egg in the nest of a brooding bird, and now,—what a fistful!"

Cythera needed not to be told what had happened. "It is Enceladus—the dead come back!"—she exclaimed with fine intuition, and in her quickened breath was the fever of hate. Pushing me into a cubiculum, she murmured cheerfully, "Be perfectly quiet,—no man need die before his time."

It was a tiny chamber, lighted by two panes of glass and half filled by a gilded bedstead. I seated myself near a dressing table, whereon were spread a mirror of dark purple glass, some ointment pots, a dice box, and a wax tablet and stylus.

For some moments I had missed Vaini, and now, as the new-comer strode in

" he exclaimed, 'you will end by making me believe that ambition is the only aim . In the most desperate hour I cherished the thought of you till now the sight of you chills me '

and tossed his cloth hat upon a table, I was stupified to behold in him my tutor transfigured to the semblance of a Roman. And yet it was not my Nineteenth-Century companion, but his prototype, the philosopher changed to an impressive embodiment of physical power, ruthless as a scythe.

He wore a corselet of embroidered silk over a tunic decorated with richly ornamented bands which reached to his knees. From his shoulders fell a mantle of gossamer texture, and his feet were shod with leather buskins whose soft lining served in lieu of socks. By a strap over his shoulder hung a short heavy sword like a hunter's blade, on whose hilt was modelled a tiny boar, the emblem of the Tenth Legion. His hair had become close cropped, his face suddenly bronzed, the mouth larger and thinner-lipped than Vaini's. Only the same soul of swiftness looked from those far-seeing eyes, and in them I read the indomitable will that through immortal centuries had chased many a golden-dusted King.

Cæsar's narrative of his conquest of Gaul is the finest exponent of force ever put upon paper. Between the lines of that recital of heroic science we perceive that when the tragic side was weighed the rest counted for nothing. What cared the Tenth Legion, wiping its crimsoned sword, for aught beyond its sanguinary autograph! The face of Enceladus said, as distinctly as a page of the Commentaries, that the more clean strokes are given the fewer will be received. Vaini a Centurion of the thunder-throated! Only to look upon him one knew that to yield to less than Fate was not in that forthright soul. It was indeed Vaini, but cast in an antique mould, with a new look of self-centred stoicism, for he had suddenly become a soldier, and a soldier lives near to the heart of great things.

I glanced between the curtains, and saw him speaking to Decius, his son, who drew back before him.

"Grown hair on thy lip," he sneered. "By Cerberus, thou shalt grow a tail as well. Thou art dumb as the desert. Augur," he cried, turning to Appian: "bid your cook serve me a slice of bacon in a mess of stale peas—I have come far and am hungry." Then, throwing himself on a cane lounge, he added: "Tell Cythera to come hither and sit by my side."

III.

The master of the house curtly dismissed Januarius to the kitchen. Bacon and stale peas were easily provided, but I smiled at the evasion which followed the summons of Cythera.

"Enceladus," cried the Augur, with demonstrative gladness, "you are thrice welcome. We have heard gruesome things . . . of the Legion surprised in the Pannonian forest, of a fighting line formed amid quicksands, of the encircling enemy. Months went by, we feared the worst, and in thinking of you my life's colour faded to ashen grey. How well I remember our last talk in this garden! I told you Puteolana was loath to leave her childhood's home, and offered to sell it you for five hundred thousand sesterces. Now, ere she comes, let us strike hands upon the bargain, and it shall be yours to greet your affianced with the word that yonder sea of sunshine, these sweet paths, this wistful green, remain hers."

The soldier listened with disdain. "You have an upreaching mind," he sardonically answered, "and so have I. The girl shall not come empty-handed; the Villa shall indeed be hers, as your gift, together with five hundred thousand sesterces. I should not have asked so rich a dower for her, but be that as you will. Thus much being agreed, give me truce to ambiguous grumblings, and tell me why it is I still await Cythera."

"She comes, Centurion; she but adorns herself; girls that go to meet the lover of their choice must needs paint the rose."

How keenly at that critical moment I remembered Vaini's anticipation, that albeit the incidents of our adventure might appear as mere remembered happenings, yet the shapes to be encountered were capable of proving dangerous in the extreme! I dared not look through the curtains of the cubiculum, but heard Cythera's sandalled feet, and divined the embarrassment of her meeting with Enceladus in the presence of his son. This was not lost upon her first betrothed, and he came to the point with characteristic directness.

"Girl!" he exclaimed, "you will end by making me believe that ambition is the only aim. Through a dozen misadventures mine has been the patience which has known how to wait. While I have made my slow-trod way hither something overhead beckoned on. Through the long retreat I mused upon love's unfoldings. In the most desperate hour I cherished the thought of you—till now the sight of you chills me."

An instant's silence followed, then the Centurion's chair was overturned and the pavement rang with his step.

I have mentioned that in my first sight of Appian's Villa a hound stood watching the gambols of some foxes. It now advanced to the door of the cubiculum and looked in at me through the half-drawn curtain. At this indication Enceladus sprang to his feet, crying: "To how many things dogs listen that are beyond reach of human ear!" Then the drapery was flung aside, and the Centurion of the Tenth stood regarding me with no friendly eye.

His likeness to Vaini was so absurd that I might have taken the figure for a martial transformation. Even the manner and gestures were so strikingly familiar, however seemingly grotesque, that I bit my lip to hide a smile.

"You laugh!" he ejaculated angrily. "You dare to laugh!"

His menace and the rhythm of those sonorous vowels clutched my heart. Here was Vaini about to strike with the very fate whereof he had warned me. With this astounding metamorphosis before me, it was useless to seek to make myself known, and I shuddered to think of the consequence of an incautious word. For a moment we stood observing one another, while the afternoon's lengthening shadow crept towards me with death lurking behind. It occurred to me with gruesome distinctness that had I wished to commit suicide I could not have advanced more accurately to my destruction.

"I find you alone," he exclaimed; "yet Appian says there is one with you. Where is that other?"

I longed to blurt the truth: "It's you, now so strangely travestied, I came with," but stifled the words and answered, "I fervently wish he stood in my place."

"Who is he?" asked the Roman, with Vaini's habit of clasping and unclasping his interlacing fingers, "and why wish him in your place? Speak up, man: your discourse lacks wings!"

"Because his is a spirit kindred with your own. His life has been spent unravelling tangled skeins, and like you he has dealt with forces and conquered them. He insists that the only thing worth living for is bringing the impossible to pass. He has high courage and a neck unbowed, for one who has spent a lifetime among the Immortals fears no man."

The threat faded from the face that was so startling, yet so familiar. "Faltering feet sometimes reach their goal," he answered, "and yours may not be far astray. Walk with me to the end of the garden, and tell me who and what you are."

"I am born of the school of Epicurus," I replied, "and with Horace I take my portion from the marrow of the day."

"What is your name?"

"As a boy they called me William the Silent."

"You have been brought from some remote country and evidently from another age. Who can say what drift floats from one sphere to another! Does Rome still rule?"

"The things that made Rome great are still supreme."

"Yet I warrant it is still the same old empty-barrel world the Cæsars found it?"

"The stars continue to repeat their crystal prophecy; we still gather wild grapes in our neighbours' vineyard; the wood-nymphs beckon and the wines still run. There is no change save a frothing buzz and clank of wheels."

He stood listening attentively, plucking a flower asunder whilst gazing towards the diamond-dust sunshine across the Bay, and smiling as from Surrentum's rocky bosom the bugle-call of a marching cohort smote the air with triumph. Perhaps that sweet exultant summons seemed to him an omen of good. Superstitious as were all great men of antiquity, and knowing their religion to be fairy lore, they believed in and dreaded fate.

"You talk like an artist," he said, as with a sudden inspiration, "and the gods have sent you here to do me a rare service. Can you be depended on?" he asked, tapping me friendliwise on the shoulder.

"I am no less trustworthy," I answered with decision, "than the Italian Government itself."

"I have had enough," he began, turning full upon me, "of the attack and defence which make up a soldier's life. I hate the city, with its weary, envious, disappointed swarm. I have had overmuch of things that come and go like gilded galleys. I wish to fill a beaker with the richness of solitude with Cythera and drain it to the lees. For the great world, it will content me to be an onlooker a panther crouched on the bough. Age has its October sunshine, when I can sit at home with Homer, counting the gold of what is past and laughing at the insolence of the Forum. But there is a fly in my wine which you alone can remove. I am plagued by an undefined misgiving that Decius—my own son, mind you—looks amorously upon the girl to whom I am betrothed. Wherefore I wish you to exercise immediately this art you understand so well, and transport him with yourself to the far land whence you came."

"What am I to do there with Decius?" I ejaculated, aghast at the demand.

The Centurion, still clasping and unclasping his hands, eyed me with amusement. "You will be great," he said, "even in small things. Take him to your sanctuary and be to him as a younger brother. Yield to him in all things, for, like me, he is wont to rule. If thwarted he will surely kill you—not that one of your courage shuns death, for it is a man's life, not his ending, that matters. I do not wish to harm Decius—is he not my son? But he is horribly in my way—wherefore in Jove's name take him and go."

"Vaini!" I interrupted furiously, "much as I love you, this is beyond a jest."

The Roman heeded not, adding, with my tutor's Dantesque twist of the lips in his smile: "Things are sometimes adamant, but men and women can be bent or broken. I will bring Decius, and you shall take him by the hand. You understand the use of the talisman, which consists in fixing the thought upon a star called the Weaving Maiden, which possesses the Secret of the Seven South Streams. Cast the stone into fresh water not salt—and together you will vanish." So saying Vaini turned with a careless nod, and a departing nightmare

leaves no profounder relief than I felt at seeing my Centurion-tutor stride lightly away.

At the sound of a softer footfall on the grass, I glanced behind me and beheld Puteolana. Something drew me irresistibly near, with an impulse grown suddenly tender. Upon her face was the radiant pagan delight in the health and beauty of the physical body. In that enchanted hour she seemed the incarnate youth of all antiquity—an embodiment of ancient graceful things that I had mused upon and learned to love, and that I now found bright-eyed and golden-haired and beautiful beyond the poetry of thought.

"My father seeks you," she said, with a ripple of mirth. "You are to buy this villa, after which you can bid both Enceladus and Decius begone." Then with a merry laugh she added, "It is to be yours for only six hundred thousand sesterces,—he swears, by Hercules, it is given away."

It flashed upon me that such a possession was indeed the glistening jewel I had sought through half a lifetime. With unaccustomed audacity I caught Cythera's hand, and, surprised at my boldness, murmured,—"Flowers, music, wine . . . this splendid sunshine . . . and you!"

"My father's counsel," she interrupted, a sudden passion thrilling the undertone of her voice, "is not mine. You have come from some rare domain, beyond the edge of things we know. You are here in imminent danger between two violent men. There came with you a sinister-visaged scholar, a half-fed, mournful shade. He has vanished, and what has befallen him? Are not you in like jeopardy? Wherefore, for your own sake, escape while you may, and thank whatever gods there be."

"Can I forget," I answered, "that your peril is greater than mine, or could I leave you to face it alone! To what extremity may not Enceladus go when he learns that you—his affianced when he went hence—are now, on his return, betrothed to Decius?"

The girl stood silent, her face darkening a little at my words: perhaps this was but one of the subtle veils the afternoon was leaving. At that tranquil moment I divined the salutation the passing day receives at sunset from the setting sun.

"It seems a kiss," I whispered, "when twilight touches the dark—a kiss thrilling with thought of happy things past or to come. For whom the omen, if not for you and me?"

As I spoke the woodpecker in the atrium tapped on his perch a solemn sound, as though some guardian of the bourne wherein I was trespassing had warned back an intruder.

Instinctively we glanced through the half-drawn curtains, and beheld Decius approaching, doubtless seeking to elude his father. At sight of me his sullen face lightened, and he addressed me with words of intense emotion. As he spoke, Cythera moved to the Egyptian harp and ran her fingers over its strings, the fine accords seeming a setting to his words. Once, years before, I had heard a song within a song, wherein the double harmony rang true, and the meaning of the one gave profounder significance to the other. Each was distinct in melody—each beautiful as a shower of falling stars. Now, though the words and music were interwoven, I read in Cythera's eyes the veiled import of that heart-beat cadence, and understood that she too was speaking with wistful entreaty—faint as the whisper of falling leaves.

The persuasive phrases of Decius disconcerted me. I should not have looked for such warmth from one whose shallow selfish nature stood self-revealed. Yet I have rarely listened to a more earnest appeal, a trifle theatrical in its declamation,

but urged with force and with a grace of rendering to which none could have listened unmoved.

"Let us consider," I said, "precisely what it is you wish me to do." At this he clasped me in his arms—and as he did so, Cythera walked away.

"I alone," he ejaculated, "believe you human and not the phantom Appian says. The art which brought you here can transport you back whence you came, and whoever touches you at that instant will likewise vanish away. What I ask is this. Take my father presently by the hand and will him with yourself to Ultima Thule. My father is not too old to be useful; there are years of labour in that iron frame. Remember it is you that have brought upon us his calamitous presence."

The truth forced itself upon me with startling distinctness that I was but an unbidden stranger among these people, an unwelcome visitor at that. Their hates and loves were not for me to meddle with—any heedless trifling might be the means of irreparable wrong. My eyes rested on the wall opposite, where, painted with marvellous foreshortening, the Laocoon struggled with his serpents and turned upon me an anguished face. I glanced back at Decius, and beheld the same tormented spirit.

"If," I said, quite vanquished, "you bring the Centurion to me and place his hand in mine . . . ."

Then, as Decius nodded, I remembered Cythera's harp-song, and my voice fell.

IV.

The day had lapsed to calm, the grape leaves mellowing on the sun-browned wall, the sea reflecting a cobalt blue. Beneath the cliff were foamy shallows grown almost still, and across the Bay Vesuvius was faintly stained with sunset shafts, that changed its white wreath to a rust-red smoke. Behind me stretched the upland woods, where to this day dwell the cool winds and the silent shadows. In the repose of such a scene, may not we deem that something of the inspiration overhead—the flash of ascending wings and amorous whisper of leaves—passes, half felt, into the life beneath!

"Yes," murmured Cythera's voice, "though faint as a breath-stain on a mirror, they shall outlast the things we shape and fashion for eternity."

To my wonder the tears were starting from her eyes. At that instant I heard the chimes of dear old Nineteenth-Century San Vincenzo, followed by the droning of a priest before the altar where floats a glorified Madonna. And to this day, when church bells chime and anthems swell, I see Cythera's face transfigured beyond the tears of earth!

These familiar sounds of modern Sorrento startled me with their evidence that the figure before me, and the Roman villa and the metempsychosis of Vaini were hallucinations frail as those marvels of alchemy a word sufficed to shatter. Yet how vivid the illusion! How present in Cythera was the imaginative realism of the antique mind, how natural seemed her physical being, even to the white scar on her arm where in childhood the flesh had been lacerated by some animal's teeth! We stood thus, looking into one another's eyes, while the brief moments flew all too quickly. At her neck hung an amulet bearing the Greek word Εὐχύχει, *Be of good courage*, and this I raised to decipher in the sunshine. As the hours passed it seemed to me we came to speak a language familiar to us both. How often have I sought to recall its fluent phrases, wherein the meaning leaped almost before the spoken word! And standing thus beside this unhappy girl, the thought flashed in my mind, After the expectancy of years,

"He understood, and with a final effort came towards us, tore the onyx from me and sent it whirling far into the sea."

must her waiting be all for nought? The onyx was in my hand, and its use had been explained. Now that Vaini had taken on a new and fearful nature, I had no stronger wish than to escape him. Suppose that, instead of awaiting his return with Decius, I took Cythera's hand and willed us both away! Could I but breathe into her being the soul of an intense desire, might not I draw her from one world to another even into the refuge of my own life?

The sun was sinking in the emerald sea and sparkling in Cythera's hair. About us was that twitter wherein mating birds exchange their gentle promises,—not as feigning poets that sing for others, but in a passion all their own. Beside me was the splash of water falling from the fountain's marble edge, and bearing to my fancy a meaning of musical enchantment.

"Puteolana," I murmured, "you say that you have waited many lifetimes,—who can affirm that I have not likewise been awaiting you, unconsciously, as darkness waits the dawn? Are not the paths of the Immortals at the edge of the clouds? Wherefore let us master Fate and gain our own. Link your destiny with mine, and far hence together we will watch the twilight weave, and whisper to each other the words that none but lovers speak. By Hera, to whom do we belong if not to those we love!"

"It is so strangely sudden," cried the girl, drawing back, her face filled with the softness of Italian summer.

"The best things in life," I answered, "come swiftly and unaware."

"Dare I trust myself with a new-found friend without so much as waiting for a father's benediction?"

"If you delay," I replied, "your father will give you with his benediction to Enceladus."

Her hand was in mine, and I had raised the magic stone, and was about to plunge it in the impluvium, when a violent crash of something overturned resounded.

At the end of the peristyle a blue bowl of roses had been thrown from its pedestal, and on the ground beside its fragments lay Decius. Before him stood Vaini, his face ablaze. It was easy to guess that Decius had revealed his own betrothal to Cythera, that the Centurion had struck his son violently to earth; and now Decius arose and paused menacing, vindictive, evil-eyed.

Was I about to behold a tragedy of Roman days!

An angry flush suffused the young man's countenance, and there were flecks of bloody froth upon his tunic. Appian, with white frightened face, had tried to separate the struggling men, and now, seemingly beside himself, was spinning round like a mad dog. Near by stood the hunchback, convulsed with fiendish glee.

Then with deadly swiftness Decius fled away, reappearing at an upper window with a Numidian bow and arrows. One of these he fitted with deliberation to the string, and discharged it as Vaini turned, the shaft striking edgewise and sinking through the face. A second pierced the shoulder as the Centurion sprang towards the stair and drew his sword. The sound of a scuffle followed, then Decius was flung headlong from the window, and lay where he fell.

"*Habet!*" cried Vaini, calmly wiping his sword. "*Habet!*" he repeated, with exultant pleasure, as though the word rang with joy. Then he descended to the fountain, and carefully bathed his wounds. Suddenly he straightened with a slight convulsion . . . the Numidian arrows were poisoned.

My eyes were riveted upon the pallor of his face and on his quivering lips. I was about to witness how the last of the Tenth Legion could die without fear, repentance, or benedicite.

As though wondering at my presence, his lurid gaze fastened upon me standing

with Cythera's hand in mine, and the talisman in my grasp. Then . . . he understood, and with a final effort came towards us, tore the onyx from me and sent it whirling far into the sea. I heard a deep sob wrenched from his fainting heart, then his hands clutched at the overleaning myrtle, and sinking to earth he covered his face. What triumph must have filled that last conscious instant, for though Puteolana was lost to him, she was equally beyond the reach of Decius or of me!

Where the stone fell among the ripples I seemed to see a flash of fire. At its contact with salt water the Pompeian atrium shrivelled with a fluttering roll. The ground lurched like the deck of a sinking ship, and I staggered as though struck by a wave. I was conscious of having touched the revelation that centuries have groped for—yet fallen one step short of the goal. Instinctively I turned towards Cythera, and for a bewildered instant the space of one long heart-beat—gazed fixedly upon her. I knew it was my last look upon the face I should remember and dream of, but never again behold. It was the moment's pause between sound and silence as I listened to her murmur-voiced adieu.

"You will come back for me some day," she whispered. "I shall be near—no further than the vanished morning from afternoon. In some life, somewhere, you shall find me again."

The words died, and her last movement was an outstretched hand,—then the brilliant figure faded, and in its place the lilac bush of Vaini's garden appeared, its sun-shot branches suddenly radiant with extraordinary splendour.

* * * * * * *

I was lying on the ground, and beside me sat Vaini staring vacantly at the sea where a moment before he had cast the Mist Stone. The resemblance remained so strong that for an instant I thought it was Enceladus. But the Roman Villa had left no trace, and in its stead rose the modern house and orange grove. Near by waited Pasquale, holding a watering-can, which he must have emptied over me, for I was half drenched.

"Thank God, dear Master," I exclaimed, "you are still alive! Oblige me by looking behind the lilac bush—Puteolana may still be there. And yet I fear the sunset . . ."

"Sunset!" impatiently echoed Vaini, "it is high noon: the clock marks a quarter-past twelve."

"Cythera will vanish while we talk."

"Puteolana . . . Cythera . . . two young women! Companion of my studies, how often have I warned you against this taste for doubtful adventure?"

"There was but one—you took her from me an instant ago. And how can you say it is high noon, when a moment since the sun was sinking behind Ischia! Oh, Vaini, such an hour as I have spent would redeem the commonplace of a lifetime."

"The sun is indeed warm to-day," assented my tutor, with a soft whistle; "and by St. Peter it is a dizzy world. Friend of my soul, you should not take two cups of coffee at breakfast."

"An occult force," I interrupted, "lingering pent up through the ages, has been brought to life. It is the long arm of coincidence."

"Carissimo, it is the long bow of coincidence, but the bow if bent too far will break. Pasquale, throw more water over his head."

"It was not a long bow that Decius bent, but a short one, and the arrows were poisoned. One struck you in the face . . . strange it has left no wound. How many hours did the experiment last?"

"Hours!" murmured the wise man, laying his hand upon my pulse—"it is but fifteen minutes since it commenced, and five since your folly ended it. We had just brought the Roman Villa into view when you snatched the onyx from me. Then you rushed about, talking and gesticulating wildly. Pasquale and I were struggling with you till you flung it over the cliff and reeled to the ground."

"But you," I retorted, "were there with me, disguised as Enceladus. At one moment I feared you would draw that short sword and do me a mischief."

"I almost wish I had," replied my tutor, "before you cast my treasure into the sea. There are many border-lands, and you may have slipped across one of them for ten minutes. If indeed you penetrated the atrium of the ancient world, it is but too evident that you have destroyed its signboard. Wherefore not another word, or you will rouse Homeric laughter."

* * * * * * *

It is eleven years since these things happened, and now that Vaini is no more, and the sun-resplendent villa that he loved is mine, I walk with him in memory amid the half-light of its orange grove, and trace again those darkling ways through which he sent me an unmeasured distance.

I study the wall-bound winding lanes of my garden in the aspect of all hours and seasons. I sit beneath the myrtles, where the cloister dips, and watch the sparkle upon the under-water blue. The sunshine paints its arabesques upon Vesuvius. Above the Monastery buttress hang sprays of silver shaft and farewell summer, weaving their tendrils in tapestry. Here for a thousand years olive after olive has grown, each in turn uplifting its boughs of velvet-grey. From a distance comes the vibrant piping of a hermit thrush, and I remember the thrill of the Spartan flute and the broken heart of its music. Day mellows, and flushes Posilipo and Nisida and all these opalescent shores Poseidon loved. There is in the air a sense of faint, far voices. Overhead, at night, the great star garden kindles with a meaning the ancients thought to read. Yonder, amid the windrift of last summer's leaves, is the fountain, unearthed when the *Caserma del Gesù* was building, four hundred years ago, wherein I saw the Greek girl dip her hands and drink. In the twilight of early morning those Spartan maidens still scatter my borders with wild violets; each May-time the poppies I remember touch its greensward with their Roman gold.

Idling amid the orange trees and ilexes, I am conscious that I stand amid the Poets. Through many a long mid-afternoon the sea beckons with white hands and I mark the flush fade upon the enclasping hills. A voice speaks; for who, appealing to Nature, goes wholly without response? Yes, a voice speaks, for the coralline lilac bush remains the living inspiration of my garden. Through the drapery of its pink flakes I first beheld Puteolana, and to this day I instinctively glance behind its crimsoning spray with a thought ever sweet and wild. The branch her eyes beheld in bloom is blooming now. The breeze blows a flavour of romance through those fine blossoms, as though they were the living foliage of many faded summers. I cannot hear Cythera speak—her voice sinks across the centuries, . . . yet when the song bird calls—pleading, passionate, irresistible—I turn with sudden emotion. Its leaves renew the touch of flower-soft fingers. And I ask myself if a tree so beautiful, so mindful of the seasons, so responsive to sunshine and to shade, has not some living consciousness—some subtle sense of dreams!

Thus musing, my thoughts fly ever to the bourne wherein I trace that transfigured hour I lived in the ancient world. Half my life has been illumined by the afterglow

of a day. I fancy Cythera standing where I beheld her as the centuries surged between us. I meditate upon the link which for a moment brought our lives in contact, and delight myself with the belief that, however frail, it is imperishable. Does she too walk these quiet paths at evenfall, and is the Villa as present to her as to me? Or is hers the living reality, and am I but the phantom of a day? A leaf from the tree-top flutters and falls to the ground and I know that when I am dead I shall remember Cythera and the touch of her velvet lips.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

"Through many a long mid-afternoon the sea beckons with white hands, and I mark the flush fade upon the enclasping hills."

"And often, thinking of the feet whose tread has smoothed these cloister walks I remember the wan, grey figure of Eunice, telling her beads, and fancy behind her, leaning at the monastery well, a radiant and imperishable vision of Guinevere."

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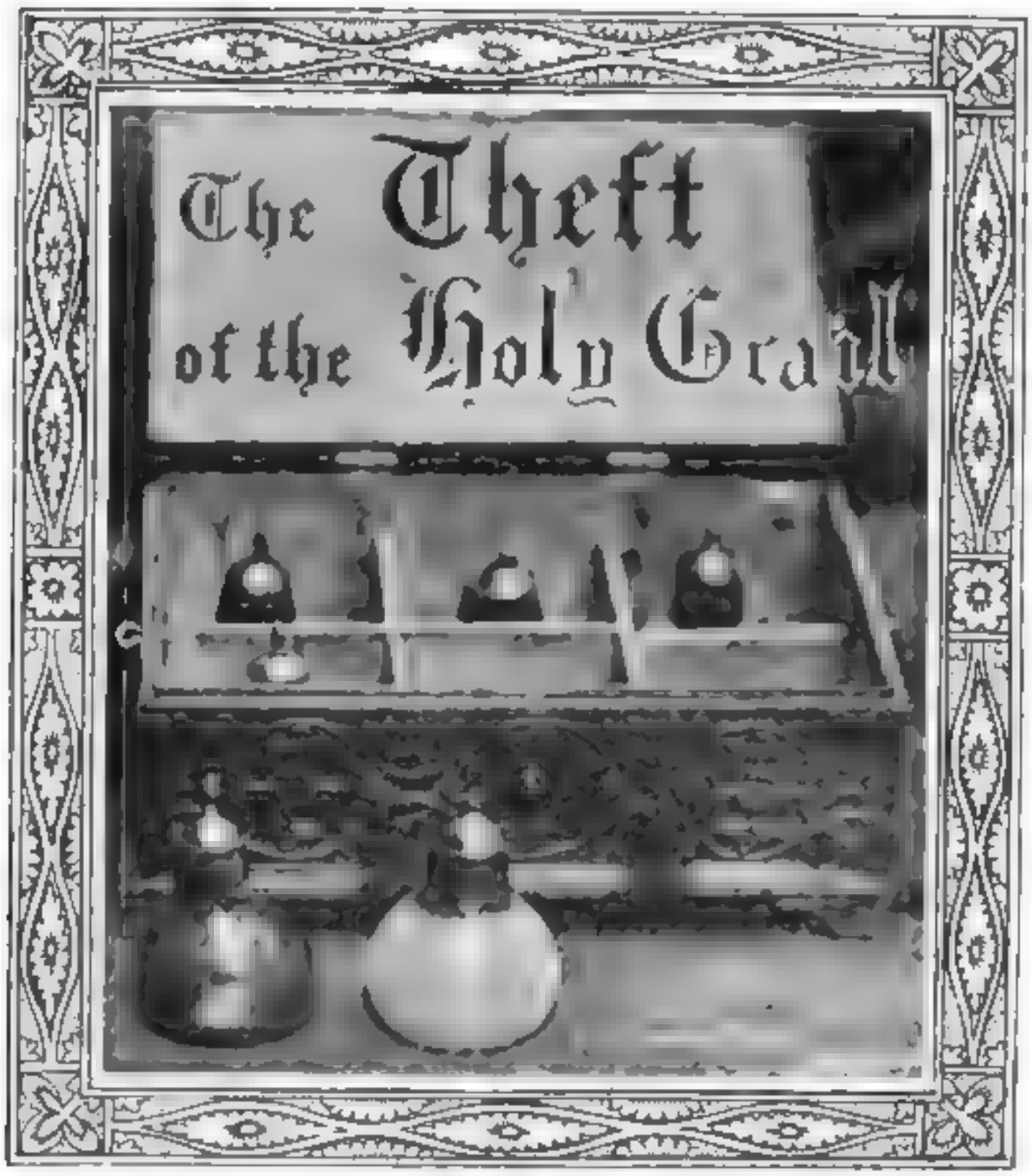

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. ZIGLIARA.

I.

ON the morning of February 21, 1900, sitting at Professor Vaun's laboratory table at the Villa Sirena, I pushed from me, with a movement of despair, his famous Casquet of Essentials, whose contents I had been studying. That casquet—the master's tool-chest—is in my possession since my tutor's tragic death, and, re-examining its vials for the hundredth time, I am moved to write the story of an experience when, in a heedless hour, I ventured without his knowledge to apply one of its essences to a problem upon which we were engaged. Before me are its tiny flacons, filled by him with curious potsons, that in his marvellous adaptation held, not death, but life and benediction. Fastened in its lid are the compasses and rule and weights wherewith he estimated unknown quantities, and an ivory chart, on whose fine surface he traced that perspective wherein the fateful things of life begin and end.

When at Christmas he invited me to Sorrento, he met me with an exultant exclamation: "I have discovered the theory of a cleaving impetus as powerful as the finest flight of the master-mind." For some weeks thereafter we had been employed upon one of those enigmas of psychical research which seem like some sand-worm shape washed up from the deep of sunken things. A month later he had been suddenly summoned to Naples, I knew not upon what haunted errand, leaving me alone, in possession of his laboratory, where I had spent a week in fascinating study. Each afternoon I travelled farther from the evanescent things of to-day toward undiscovered outposts, and at evening, before the blazing logs, pursued those gleams that from remote ages have illuminated and perplexed the mind.

"Is it possible," I asked myself that morning, "that an amorous passion may continue between the living and the dead?"

As in that instant's discouragement I brushed aside the casquet's phantom world, the door opened, and Pasquale, our custode at the Villa Sirena, handed me a telegram from Vaini, asking me to join him immediately in Naples. It was yet early, and as my carriage sped out of Sorrento, the burnished slopes of Vesuvius were flushed as pearls that glisten in the sun. Above the mountain floated a pink film like a poised almond-flower. I remember how, looking earlier from my window, I had watched the shadows fade as the primrose tints of sunrise kindled, and had listened to the richness and variety of the music of the sea. It was a day so transcendent that its breath trembled with the fragrance of bygone yet immortal roses, and, looking beyond the luminous green, one might have deemed Vaini's alchemic art had transfigured the far horizon to a land of gold.

I found my former tutor at the house of a friend, his features reflecting from the facets of his mind that significance of a being intent upon the goal. "A fighter," Vaini was wont to say, "must possess the fighting edge," and this, through years of toil and triumph, had become traced upon his countenance. I knew at a glance that he was busy upon one of those strange problems whereof he had solved so many—that, as so often before, he had matched himself single-minded against forces vast, uncomprehended, sinister, perhaps death-dealing to an intruder.

"I have sent for you," he began, "because an affair which at first seemed the application of mere ingenuity to the recovery of a stolen object has suddenly become complicated. I wish you to unravel its minor threads, leaving me to concentrate upon the others. Can I depend upon your bringing an unflagging good-will?"

"Dear master," I exclaimed, "my happiest hours have been those spent in the splendid freedom of your service."

"An object," he thoughtfully observed, "renowned through Christendom, and secure of immortality hereafter, after being lost and found centuries ago, has now been lost again. You do not need to be told that I refer to the Holy Grail."

"But the Holy Grail," I interrupted, "or the emerald chalice to which that name is given, has reposed in this city since the sixteenth century, in the possession of the Cathedral of San Gennaro. It is impossible that it can have been stolen or lost."

"*Impossible!*" echoed the wise man. "Only to think that at intervals for thirty years you have had my instruction and advice, and that after profuse and varied study and experiment you have not yet learned that in this *bizarre* world things deemed impossible are continually happening. Are you better than an amateur?"

"At least, Professor," I answered, piqued by this rebuke, "my surprise is natural. I have often looked at the Holy Grail, locked in its bronze-bound crystal case, watched night and day by Ursuline nuns. Jealous eyes observed it incessantly, no one was suffered to approach within the rail, and for two hundred years none less than cardinal or king has touched it."

"Of course there was complicity among the nuns," assented Vaini, twirling the big green pencil wherewith in hours of abstraction he drew geometric tangents and ellipses which conveyed a mathematical expression of the subject before us in a language I had grown to understand.

"What interest have we," I inquired, "in the loss or recovery of that curious tazza?"

"The scientific world," he answered, speaking with Italian smoothness, "has doubted the value—even the existence—of my loftiest discoveries. So true is it that Truth is slow in coming to the front. That man may acquire new powers by the resuscitation within him of animal instinct, that the wild creature's method of returning to remote localities may be used in mental processes, that the unconscious operation whereby the brain grasps an elusive solution may be raised to a certainty, are things a decadent age calls visionary. But imagine the effect were they successfully directed to some matter-of-fact business on which public attention happened to be fastened!"

"Professor," I inquired, "what is to be my share in the work? Make it an easy task; I know so little of the technique of these things."

"Carissimo," replied the wise man, "I only ask you to apply what I have taught you of the prime movers to our occult periphery. Already I am on the trace of the guilty, a foreigner aged about fifty-five, quite bald, and, from the movement of his lips, talking very fast."

"You have seen him?" I exclaimed.

"Only in the darkness of the dust film we have used together. He is in hiding not far away, and we shall find him when my indications are perfected. To-day you will oblige me by giving your attention to a shrivelled old woman, an Ursuline nun, who was on watch the night the sacrosanto was stolen, and who knows the thief."

"How can you tell that she knows the thief?"

"Because a minute interrogatory has established the fact," rejoined the Professor, with an amused smile. "She admits having been so overcome at recognising his identity, while the theft was being committed, as to have lost all presence of mind."

"Then why not make her tell his name?"

"Companion of my studies, that is for you to do," retorted my master, the smile broadening to a good-natured little laugh. "She is Sister Eunice, of the Convent of Divine Repose, perhaps once pleasing and attractive, now old, infirm, and frightened. She is English, and you will speak her own language, which I am unable to do. While you can force nothing further from her than moaning repetitions, I doubt not that, if you take her to my Villa Sirena and give peace of mind and good cheer, you may draw forth important clues. Your afternoon is filled with ungarnered harvest. A motive must be supplied, and, as you know, the strongest motive in the human heart, and one that usually loosens the tongue, is a lust for revenge. How that motive is to be used remains for you to discover. Come with me; she is in the next room, ready to go."

"Remove a nun, however old, from the control of her superiors!"

"We have both civil and ecclesiastical authority. All Naples is longing and

expectant, and has called upon me to recover its Holy Grail. Take your steps with inspiration, remembering that a woman's nature is really deep where it appears shallow. I shall expect you back in a day or two."

So saying, Vaini opened a door and motioned me into an adjoining room, where, on a reclining chair, rested an elderly woman, whose frail form was robed in the vestments of St. Ursula. She shrank before my tutor's approach, and turned upon me a countenance whereon was fixed a silent acquiescence in fate. It was the weary face of one who has suffered, and as I looked into those dark eyes I was smitten with the consciousness of an intrusion.

She answered my first words in the restrained English of the formal 'seventies, pure of the careless diction of *fin-de-siècle* days. I noticed that her fingers were carelessly, and perhaps unconsciously, busy with the beads of a blackthorn rosary. During our journey I inquired of her the history of the Holy Grail, whereof I knew little. Was it of miraculous origin, or had antiquity cast about it fables of its own? Had she been privileged to hold it in her hands, and was it in very deed carved from a single emerald?

Sister Eunice answered that she had more than once washed it with perfumed water, though she had never seen it in the full light of day. It was kept in a crystal case before the altar; where the light was chiefly of consecrated tapers. It was supposed to be of Babylonian cutting—a chalice sacred to Baal—and had been assigned to Pausanias as his share of the Persian plunder after Platæa. We are told that he presented it to the Delphic Temple of Apollo. Mark Antony gave it to Herod the Great, who bestowed it as a wedding gift upon the beautiful and ill-fated Mariamne.

This story was interrupted by a rasping little cough. My companion's taciturnity had yielded to the interest of our discussion, and perhaps to the pleasure of escaping from Vaini's interrogatory.

"And after that, my sister, what befell?"

"When Mariamne was put to death it was stolen by a servant, who sold it to Joseph of Arimathea. I need not remind you of its disappearance."

"No," I assented, "nor of the search for it by pilgrims and crusaders. All the world knows that it was found at Lepanto on the Turkish admiral's ship, and that Don John of Austria placed it in the Cathedral of Naples. Professor Vaini told me," I added very gently, "that you know nothing of its theft."

At these words the Ursuline nun averted her face, and gazed out upon the breadth and splendour of the scene before us.

"You are looking," I said, "towards the Roman Stabiæ, where years ago I beheld the skeleton of an ancient galley recovered from the deep and brought in to our sunshine, with its shells and tangle dripping, like the secret of a lifetime suddenly revealed!"

Sister Eunice turned and gazed at me fixedly.

"But now," I added carelessly, "we have only agreeable things to think of. We are nearly at our destination, where we shall find a garden spangled with December roses, and that peace without which kings are but slaves."

Half an hour later we were sitting in Vaini's library at the Villa Sirena, the tea things spread upon his work table. In my ears rang his words that Sister Eunice was to be refreshed and comforted, and her secret drawn from her unawares. My eyes passed from the shrivelled figure before me—from the face that through half a lifetime had not brightened in the light of home, the hands blanched in the service of others, the lips that had tasted bitter lees. The small ivory box in its accustomed niche riveted my thoughts. It was the Casquet of

"I must have lost consciousness, for when my eyes reopened the nun's teacup was empty, and the lute-strings were trembling beneath her touch.
I tried to speak, but my voice sounded strange and unnatural."

Essentials whose contents were familiar, though neither Vaini nor I had yet dared use the poisons those tiny vials contained.

An overwhelming temptation presented itself, for success meant a realisation of the ideal of science and imagination. I hesitated before a responsibility wherein a maladroitness might be followed by this woman's death. I was vividly conscious of having reached one of those fateful instants when a resolve which makes for the success or failure of a lifetime must be shrunk from or accepted.

A startling surprise interrupted my musing. On the wall hung an ivory lute of rare beauty, once in long-gone days familiar to Vaini's touch. Sister Eunice rose with emotion, caressing the instrument with loving fingers, and murmuring in a trembling voice—"*My lute!*"

It flashed across my thoughts that in sending me upon this visionary quest, the Professor had been disingenuous in concealing from me some acquaintance between himself and the Ursuline nun in days when he was not an arch master of curious arts, nor she a recluse from the world. In the instant's irritation that followed I resolved at any hazard to fathom the half-revealed secret that had thrust itself upon me.

Sister Eunice was so intent upon the ivory lute that she did not see me empty the vial labelled "Urohæmatoporphyria Cytheræ" into her teacup. The instantaneous effect of the faint aroma reduced me to a drowsy perception that I had been thrown thirty years backward. I must have lost consciousness, for when my eyes reopened the nun's teacup was empty, and the lute-strings were trembling beneath her touch. I tried to speak, but my voice sounded strange and unnatural. She was still standing before me, but the sea air had crimsoned her wrinkled cheeks and brightened her brown eyes. The pallid face had suddenly flushed with exultant youth, and she regarded me with a girl's laugh, young and deliciously spontaneous, rippling from the immortal heart of joy.

Then, athwart the twinkling lute-strings, and from the distance of years, I heard the refrain:

> Drink to me only with thine eyes,
> And I will pledge with mine.

II.

I was awakened next morning by a faint odour of hyacinths stealing through my open window—seeming the rich and lingering perfume of dreams.

Yes, dreams of that astounding transformation—of the awakened look of those intent brown eyes—eyes of pride and laughter, and wistful things unspoken and suddenly grown young. She was auburn-haired now, as though returning youth had crowned her with its transcendent halo. The nun's habit had faded in the pink folds of a gown, and an extraordinary warmth and richness and brilliancy had replaced the grey human shadow.

In that early reverie I listened to the undulating murmur of soft sounds without—the rhythm of wings and awakenings. What an awakening had been hers, as Vaini's poison fired her veins, and how with a woman's luminous flash of comprehension she had instantly accepted it, as though the flame of youth could never be wholly dead in a vestal bosom.

We had spent the evening in Vaini's library, and I remembered her shapely sentences sounding across my stupor at what I had done. At ten o'clock one of the Italian maids had shown her upstairs to a guest's chamber, whither her

nun's portmanteau had been taken. She had told me her name, Guinevere Godfree, the name of her English girlhood, Eunice being that assumed in her novitiate. Her youth had been unhappy, she added, and our talk covered an interplay of profound emotion. I was conscious as we spoke of things that burned to be said, yet remained unpoken. And now the day stood waiting poised in breathless silence, like Horus the immortal holding his secret with finger on his lips.

It was in Vaini's cloister garden that I found her, walking amid its triangles of lawn, its sky-swung clusters of oranges, its trickling splash of water amid monastic statues and the walls and arches about which age has cast its silver-grey.

Advancing to me with a careless gesture towards the sun-dappled walls, the climbing sweet-bays and the dilapidated steps, over which a lizard darted, she exclaimed, "It has the sense of having been lovely and beloved for centuries."

"To me," I answered, "it seems younger and more exquisite than ever before."

"The night has gone," she exclaimed with emotion, "the convent night . . ."

"And the day has come. That is why everything looks suddenly beautiful to us both."

"You have saved me from the shadow and the dust," she cried, "you have given me uplifting happiness, and I have been waiting here to ask you what has happened, whether it is real——"

"Last evening," I replied, "we climbed together from darkness into light. Does not the good Book say, 'Come, let us walk in the light'?"

"Light and gladness," she murmured, "how musically the words ring together!"

"It is in the light," I answered, gazing into her liquid eyes, "that flowers bloom!"

My words were cut short by the appearance of Pasquale, followed by a sinister-visaged man, dressed in official frock-coat, who Pasquale whispered was the Provincial Chief of Police.

Guinevere and I divined the purpose of this visit, and, drawn by a common danger, turned with composure towards the enemy.

"I had not expected to find so young a lady," observed the commissary, fixing his astonished eyes upon Miss Godfree.

"I had not expected the pleasure of this visit," I replied. "Will you tell me its object?"

"A sensational robbery has been committed at San Gennaro," explained the official, seating himself in the rustic chair to which I motioned "The Holy Grail has disappeared under circumstances which point to its acquisition by some millionaire crank. The nuns are suspected of connivance, and one of them, Sister Eunice, was in your company yesterday. You were traced together to this house which I am about to search."

"Search and be . . . blessed," I answered, "but first show me your warrant."

The document, duly signed and sealed, was produced, and his men to the number of a dozen approached the house. Two remained at the gate, two kept us under observation, two mounted guard over the servants assembled in the kitchen, while the remainder with the commissary made a domiciliary visit through the now empty house. At the end of an hour they had ransacked every room needless to say, without finding either the Holy Grail or the nun Eunice.

They had only been gone ten minutes, when a telegram arrived from Vaini requesting me to join him in Naples with all haste.

My former tutor received me with incisive questions. I dared not tell him of the transformation his elixir had wrought in the aged female commended to my

charge, observing merely that she had benefited by a charge of air, and hastening to describe the police official's visit.

The Professor's fine lips twisted in a compassionate smile. "It was not a police official," he murmured, "but the head of the Neapolitan Camorra. An expert might fail to tell them apart."

The Camorra, as every one knows, is a secret association of criminals of all classes, distributed throughout Southern Italy—a government within the Government—wielding political power, arresting justice, extorting blackmail, and enforcing its mandates in the fine and subtle manner of the *quattro cento*.

Vaini, watching me attentively as he balanced the big pencil on his forefinger, read my thoughts and softly added, "It is a Tammany Tiger, gone slightly mad, and armed with an Italian stiletto."

"What," I asked, "has the Camorra to do with the recovery of the Holy Grail?"

"The Camorra suspects the police of having stolen it, and of trying to cheat the Camorra out of its share."

"You told me the other day you conjectured the whereabouts of the chalice. Have you found it?"

"Unfortunately the police are also on its track. The man who stole it—merely for the kudos of the thing—was nearly stabbed last night, and is in extreme peril this morning. You cannot expect the police to stand by and see themselves defrauded."

"Perhaps," I said, "you know who has committed this theft?"

"Oddly enough," replied Vaini, "it is your fellow-student of thirty years ago—Orion Marblehead. Which may somewhat explain why, as my time to-day is engrossed in playing police against Camorra, I ask you to go immediately to his relief, and aid his escape from Naples."

"At the risk of my life!" I impatiently ejaculated. "Mr. Marblehead should know enough to cast a sop to Cerberus."

"That," gravely replied the Professor, "might be compounding a felony, a thing neither Camorra nor police would condescend to. Friend of my soul!" he added in caressing Italian, laying his hand upon mine, "your hesitation mortifies me. Through all these years have I been mistaken in my favourite pupil?"

I yielded weakly to this appeal, and received instructions as to the precise locality where Mr. Marblehead would show himself, at the corner of an alley called Guantai Nuovi, facing the Church of San Giacomo. I imposed a single condition. "Vaini," I said, "I, as well as the Camorra, have a conscience, and not for an instant will I be custodian of stolen property."

On reaching the Piazza del Municipio, and pausing at the squalid street indicated, I observed that a funeral Mass had just been celebrated in the church before me, and that the cortège, a few bystanders, and the Frati della Misericordia, clad in the long gowns of their order, were dispersing. One of the latter, his head covered by the usual black hood which concealed all but the eyes, brushed past me, and as he did so, I was stupefied to hear him softly whistling an American melody, "Let us drink to the girls that are waiting." I gazed after him in amazement, then, in response to a slight salutation of his hand, followed into the deserted byway. He turned as soon as we were alone, and with the familiar nasal accent of New England exclaimed: "Say, did you ever smell such a rotten peach as Naples?"

Then with great dexterity he drew off his sombre habiliment, casting it with a muttered imprecation into an open doorway, and revealing as he did so the

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features of my fellow-student of thirty-five years before. His face had become seamed with fine lines of *Hustlerium tremens Americanus* since we parted in the spring of 1870, but it was the same alert countenance of clear-cut resolve, and his crisp, incisive vernacular was still the vibrant voice of Massachusetts. As he uncovered his head, I noticed that he had become completely bald.

"I saw you come sa'ntering along," he said, shaking me warmly by the hand, "and knew you right away. Says I, 'That's dear old tenderfoot, and ain't he dressed nice, browned up some, too!' Let's go to a hash-house and snatch a lunch," he added, drawing on a cap. "I am most starved, and want a square lay-out. The drinks are on you," he added with a smile and a wink—"I'm a stranger."

I led the way to Pilsener's Restaurant round the corner, and learning that a turkey was being roasted in the kitchen, ordered it taken upstairs to a private room, together with the obbligato accompaniment of chippolata sausage, giblet sauce, stewed celery, and purée de pommes.

Mr. Marblehead observed these preliminaries with satisfaction, wiping two or three shining beads from his bald pate, and pouring forth his phrases with packed richness of expression. "Let me readjust the focus of events," he began; "this waiter has no more sense than a coroner's jury. I had a small shoat for Christmas dinner, and it seems like I've not had a bust-out since then. Why not? Because I had a brace on such a job as doesn't come once in a century. Say, these Neapolitans have no more shame than a back-yard cat. Yes, sir, it is a big job, and I want you to help me *right now*. I want you to get on to it P.D.Q—pretty . . . dam . . . quick."

"Mr. Marblehead," I said as the turkey was placed before us, "I hope that you have found happiness in all these years since we were students together."

"Happiness!" he echoed, helping himself abundantly; "some men would say a cool drink, a thirty-cent partaga, and the American Sunday papers. I had all that, and it was not enough."

"Not enough!" I ejaculated.

"It's thirty-two years," pursued my companion reflectively, "since I met with an accident. I got engaged to be married. She was an elegant lady, clean as a hound's teeth, and not a fly on her. She had all the hall-marks of youth and beauty, right down to the ground. Her poppa was in the book trade in Amen Corner, and I met them crossing from Liverpool to New York, where the old man had business. She had a small dog, the peskiest-tempered animal you ever saw—I called him Bitters because he had so much bark and w'ine. Now I generally hit a winning stride, but love-making has never been my strongest hold. I looked over all four sides of her, and brought my proposal down to business. 'Will you have me?' I said—'satisfaction guaranteed, or the money returned.' When I told her poppa I was willing to take his daughter off his hands, he just looked me over in that dignified English way, enough to freeze the stuffing in a lightning rod. He was the sort of man that makes a point of solid silver handles to his coffin. I was worth half a million dollars in those days, and her poppa and I jollied her into saying yes. It jarred me some when she broke the engagement, telling me something I sawed down to mean I was not the only pebble on the beach. I reckon I saw red just then!" And remembering his wrongs Mr. Marblehead lapsed into profanity, wherein he breathed a defiance as sweeping as that which rings through the Athanasian Creed.

"I am sorry to hear you had so serious a misadventure," I answered

sympathetically; "but you are not one to remain long discouraged. You soon turned to other and larger fields of action."

"Action!" he repeated angrily. "Yes, and a criminal action at that. I am in for the fight of my life, and I always fight to a finish. Say, if you value nerve thrills, spend to-night dodging about with me; you really can't afford to be out of it, and, say, bring a five-shooter with you: the way to parry is to fire first." With which words he produced a small package, and removing a strip of chamois skin revealed a green chalice, apparently cut from a monster emerald, three inches in height and the same in diameter.

"Look at her," he exclaimed, exultingly smiting the table; "she's worth a king's ransom, even when kings were rated high. With the money Bond Street would give for that, I could settle in England, buy out some belted and busted earl, and look up my fiancée of years ago. It's the weakness of my character that I still care for the woman—the fact is, sir, she's fifty per cent. grit and the rest pure gold."

"This is the Holy Grail," I ejaculated, "stolen some days ago from the Cathedral. Mr. Marblehead, I am shocked to find it in your possession."

"Do you think," he answered with a chuckle, "that a man has no ambition! Years ago I had enough of sending shuttles back and forth and calling it strenuous life. I resolved to do something great. A voice whispered, 'The man that gets away with the Holy Grail is decorated. All the world from Launcelot and Guinevere to our own day will pay to hear him lecture how he lifted it.'" So saying, Mr. Marblehead bit off a piece of plug tobacco, and spat with faultless accuracy into the eyes of a cat that stood sniffing like Lazarus at the gate.

"Guinevere!" I murmured thoughtfully, taking the emerald in my hand.

"Yessir," continued my companion reflectively, "from Joseph with his corner in wheat when Egypt was starving, right down to modern times, we all want to be something more than a fumble-bug. The police were on my trail yesterday, the Camorra tried to stiletto me last night. I put on that fire-escape suit and kept just about five laps ahead—now you have got to get me out of Naples, for there is big money in this."

So impressed was I with our mutual insecurity, that without waiting to conduct Mr. Marblehead to Vaini, I hurried him to Sorrento, and lodged him at the hotel adjoining our villa. I made no further allusion to Miss Godfree than to say that our former tutor had entrusted an elderly nun to my care, whose health required solitude.

III.

It was evening when I reached the villa and learned that Miss Godfree had retired to her room. The next day she came downstairs to luncheon daintily dressed in China-blue bodice and skirt, with peach-blow undersleeves. Her feather-soft hand rested in mine as she overwhelmed me with extravagant thanks for something she vaguely referred to as "a palsied heart awakened."

I am always embarrassed by thanks, so I hastily led her to Vaini's library, where a frugal refreshment was served—fried haddock with cucumber salad, quails in a bed of pommes pailles, truffles *en serviette*, and a pineapple cheese following in quick succession. I gave her the philosopher's Bohemian wine-glass filled with '48 Amaranth Madeira, a dozen of which rested in his cellar. The room, quite unchanged to this day, is a type of refined comfort. It has book-cases, deep easy-chairs, and writing-tables, and rare and beautiful objects of

Vaini's collecting; for though a man of limited means, he possessed exquisite taste for the embellishments of life. He laughingly avowed his hatred for the squalid aspects of the world. About us were rich embroideries, Toledo blades, pictures suggesting the perfection of feminine contours, Venetian mirrors, illuminated missals, Delft porcelains, crystals, and ivory Madonnas. The February sun, with fervent imagination, kindled crimson arabesques upon the damask hangings, and looking from the windows the trees in their tremulous winter foliage seemed lightly clad as nymphs whose limbs thrill with the fever of approaching spring. I thought Miss Godfree graceful as hyacinths in the wind, changing and wilful—beautiful as a summer sky. She had a flattering way of cleverly amplifying what I said, tossing my homespun thought back in embroidered silk. Her face had a delightful air of meditative self-reliance through which gleamed an aerial joy in her recovered youth.

She took my note-book from the library table, and opening it at random, read aloud the silly, scribbled words—

> "Un Baiser c'est peu de chose,
> Pas plus que feuille de rose,
> Ou qu'une feuille de laurier."

Then turning upon me those laughing brown eyes, she abruptly closed the volume, and I felt as foolish as the proverbial boy at a girls' party.

"Come with me to the garden," she presently exclaimed, as cigarettes were placed before us, "and we will gather a posy of violets." So saying, she left me in search of a hat and jacket, while I waited in the hall, where on the table lay this characteristic letter from Orion:

"DEAR SIR,

"It is always pleasant to renew an early friendship, and you acted white yesterday. I should like to return the compliment by cordially inviting you to join the Suicide Club of which I am President. Headquarters, Chicago; business hours 10 to 4. Over six hundred members scattered thoughout U.S.A., including many rising men and women of America. He who conquers fear of death, conquers by the same magnificent stroke all the fears of life. A time will come when you will have had enough—perhaps too much—of this dear old lark-singing earth. I would like to have you join right now.

"Yours truly,
"ORION MARBLEHEAD."

I was too familiar with my former colleague's originality to be surprised at this odd missive. Of the Suicide Club I knew that it had been founded during the feverish years that followed the American Civil War, that it includes a scattering of army men, a heavy percentage of doctors, a number of penniless artists, a large contingent of castaway lovers, a modicum of erratic parsons. One-fifth are women, and usually all who join have some profound disgust of life, whose poor game has ceased to be worth the candle.

In the enchantment of Miss Godfree's presence, the narrow cloister walks expanded to vistas of translucent beauty. The daylight mellowed through that suave afternoon, lighting afresh the purple and yellow bloom of the long-gone summer. The palm-trees lifted their feathery tops, motionless and breathless as ships becalmed. A fragrance of mignonette touched the air, and from the brooding lustre of the myrtles came a rich piping of the blackbird. At such a moment, who would not understand the significance which lovers feel in presence of the mating song of birds!

"The Professor's fine lips twisted in a compassionate smile. 'It was not a police official,' he murmured, 'but the head of the Neapolitan Camorra. An expert might fail to tell them apart.'"

I have often sought to recall the wonderful things we talked of, whose half-remembered meaning haunts that hour—as roses pressed in some choice volume keep something of the colour and perfume of their day. I was conscious that from the emerald sward at our feet, embroidered with flickering sunshine, many things long dormant suddenly awoke.

"How strangely these few hours have drawn us together!" I exclaimed, hesitating before the face lifted to mine. "It seems as if for both life might be begun anew, far from the things that we have suffered from and hated."

We seated ourselves at the broad old marble table at which, a century ago, the monks gathered and chatted over their coffee. "Only to think," said Miss Godfree, reading my thought, "that in their godless youth they must have revelled in the amorous fiction of Italian story-tellers, and in their winter-bitten age have recalled the pulse and passion of Italian songs they were to hear no more." And the blackbird twittering in the tree-tops sweetened his song to rapture as she spoke.

But the subject uppermost in my thoughts was my companion's life, and I begged her to tell me something of its story.

She turned wistfully a hesitating instant toward the wild-grape fragrance of the vines about us. "You wish me," she began, "to lead you from this cloister back to the garden of my English home. I had a happy girlhood, and to my father I owe a superior feminine education, as we understand such things in England. It was intended to fit me for the 'Smart Set,' if I married well and made my way. He required me to read understandingly a leader in the *Times* each morning. I knew the last dozen Derby and Goodwood winners. I was taught a smattering of French, and made to cultivate a taste in flowers, music, and cuisine, though I cared little for either. I had a Cowes Week during each of my three seasons. I rode straight to hounds, could volley a tennis-ball, and find a train in Bradshaw."

The brown eyes, that in the sunshine had a flash of golden nuggets, sought mine with kindling interest.

"After so comprehensive and practical a training," I observed sympathetically, "I am not surprised to find you in the Church of Rome. It is the only Church Militant remaining, and though myself a heretic, I doubt not that the removal of the Vatican would mean the collapse of Christianity."

"You call yourself a heretic!" observed Miss Godfree with a shocked expression.

"A disciple of Epicurus," I explained, "loving all that is beautiful in life. I have known Christians who scarcely came up to that moderate standard. But we are straying into theology. Forgive me for leading you back to yourself."

"Fate willed it," she resumed, "that in Rome in 1865, when I was a girl of eighteen, I should meet Professor Vaini, who must then have been twice my age. In the library we have just left is the lute he gave me. Can you fancy him singing love-songs, reciting Leopardi's *Gonsalvo*, and teaching me the poetry of gardens?

"From the first I was afraid of him—he was such a strange and secret man, and always in our studies I was conscious that beyond my horizon he beheld unaccountable things. My refusal brought him the morbid bitterness of wounded pride. From love he passed to cold, vindictive anger, and though thirty-five years have passed, he would willingly do me a mischief to-day.

"It was half a dozen years later that I met a man much younger than Vaini, who by an odd coincidence had also been his pupil. We crossed the Atlantic together, and met again in New York. He was a rich American; my father

urged me to accept him, and we became engaged. His was a curious nature, the very reverse of Vaini's, and so dominated by material egotism as to strip all life of its amenities and make of it a soulless hulk. He said we should live in New York, and to this day, remembering the words, I behold again the hideous background of Fifth Avenue."

"Would it be indiscreet," I asked, "to hazard a guess at your suitor's name?"

"His name," answered Guinevere carelessly, "is Orion Marblehead."

She sat silent now, tracing a pattern on the brown-needled turf beneath Vaini's pines. Far down the pergola, a sheen of dancing sunlight beckoned me on.

"Will you think me rude," I whispered, audaciously taking her hand, "if I say I dreamt of you last night? It was a splendid dream—a mirage wherein we walked together in this small garden, suddenly transfigured. And as now I took your hand and cried aloud . . ."

"You said," interrupted Guinevere, "'Let us conquer fate and be happy!' I shared that wild dream with you and felt your touch, and at the sound of your voice I awoke."

"And now," I exclaimed, drawing her to me . . .

At this critical instant I was disagreeably surprised to hear a drawling nasal voice which came from the top of the cloister wall above us utter the startling phrase:

"I have got him sewed up, you bet."

It was Mr. Marblehead, who, having climbed one of the ladders used in Sorrento gardens to trim the vines, was contemplating me, his face wreathed in smiles.

Miss Godfree sprang to her feet at the words and fled away down the path.

"Say," continued Orion confidentially, drawing a handful of peanuts from his pocket, "don't you ever trust a man with hog teeth. It's your friend the Camorra man, and I beat him hands down. It was an even dollar which jumped first. He blazed up like a bonfire when I catched him—there's no water in the well, only a mud bottom, so he fell soft. He's just about tuned to concert pitch! Listen! sounds like he was twisting knots in the devil's tail."

I remembered in the adjoining garden a disused well, a dozen feet deep, into which Orion had evidently cast his pursuer. And issuing from the earth, I faintly heard the rich and fervent fluency of Italian malediction. The unlucky Neapolitan seemed to be swearing a dozen oaths at once, reminding me of an instrument whose keys are smitten all together.

"Mr. Marblehead!" I cried excitedly, "you are placing yourself dangerously within the law. You have committed a monstrous theft, angered the entire ecclesiastical world, and assaulted an important official."

"I see you have a lady friend," observed my former fellow-pupil, coolly disregarding my words, and fastening his gaze upon the disappearing form of Miss Godfree. "I overheard you love-making just now, and—say—your love-making is loose in the handle. I dare say you think that as a velvet-edged spell-binder you hold the world's long-distance record. I allow you know how to prospect a likely spot, and if this is your own ranche, you are nicely fixed. But when you are trying to come it over a woman, you have got to talk your durndest. You want to put some ginger into it and buck up at both ends. Why don't you be a husky-tough like me and have some style? A woman likes a man that can do a quick turn. I tell you, sir," he added in a modest undertone, "when I make love, I generally lay out to beat the band. I let her have it first in the face." Then suddenly changing to another thought, he continued: "Those

low-down Italians have swindled me . . . the Holy Grail is only bottle-glass. I am going to Naples to-morrow, and if the Law Courts give me a right enough charge I'll bust their Camorra out by the roots. Before I go, take a word of advice. Your occult philosophy no longer runs smooth on all fours. I think it needs a shave. You have held its nose on the grindstone a wee mite too long. There is a dark beyond through which Vaini's two-for-a-dollar search-lights won't carry. I've entered you for the Suicide Club—it's the chance of your life. It's handier, because you hustle right away from the old man with a scythe, and he don't even have time to look for a strawberry mark on your ear. The world won't be in darkness, even though you blow out your little candle. So long."

That evening, as the clock struck eight, Guinevere came down to dinner, rose-white and smiling. Mr. Marblehead's interruption had passed unheeded. "Come," I said, leading her to table, "let us have a well-wined dinner, Irroy brut with the croquettes, Rudesheimer with the foie gras, and after salt codfish on toast we will drink scalding hot coffee in Vaini's Crown Derby cups, with a sip of 1801 Soleil Couchant Cognac for the finish."

The good cheer warmed our spirits and we talked of many things—less of the past, which we had done with, than of the future, which instinctively we realised to be ours. Before dinner I had freshly tuned the ivory lute Vaini had given her in the days of his ill-starred courtship, and when we returned to the library I placed it in her hands.

She ran her fingers deftly over its strings in fluent allegretto, and at the touch a splendid ecstasy filled the air. Before her on the table a great bunch of violets whispered their fragrant secret.

Something called me—souvenirs, regrets—or was it the unknown that is always to come? To this day I still can hear those fine accords, whose heartbreak wove the violets before her into music. Standing thus, she was superb, her fine head poised upon the figure of a caryatide. She seemed the tinted-winged image of girlhood, with its visions and romance. I remember thinking that her face was like a flower-garden, and that when she smiled the breeze was blowing over the flowers. I watched the crimson kindle on her cheek, in mute token of a heart on fire. Her thoughts seemed far away, and for an instant her eyes glistened. I was troubled at this, because the sight of tears in a handsome woman's eyes is apt to make a man do foolish things. Upon what happy wings those memorable moments flew, as in her glance I read the fascinating mystery of a promise.

Softly she sang. It was a song that flushed me with guilty joy, for I divined that a new world lay waiting where her voice summoned. It was a song to set the wild-flowers dancing, yet beneath its forest murmur I listened to a weird accent of enchantment and despair. The blackbirds that through the twilight had filled the garden with their song were silent now. I wondered if they, too, were listening.

It was a well-known German air, "Die letzte Melodie." When the songs shall all be sung and the birds shall all be dead! As she sang, the sea was murmuring a music of its own, thus seeming to make her the embodiment of minstrelsy. Her voice thrilled with the pleading of violin notes, touched with a vague, voluptuous regret

Yes, I listened with guilty joy, for across those rich accords I beheld a vision brilliant as the Arabian Nights. I had done wrong in applying Vaini's weapons to my own ends, but wrong-doing is sometimes very sweet. When the song

"The red-gold in her veins faded to silver, and clad in the dusky habiliments of St. Ursula, she stood before us, blighted and silent—an aged woman. It was so horrible a thing, that the room swam before me."

ceased in a lingering sense of tears, I knew that the time had come to speak. "I have been looking into the heart of things," I exclaimed, rising—"looking through the prism of that song. I perceive that you have waited years for me, that I have been slow in coming, but at last I am here."

"And now that you have come," answered the strange girl, looking down at her lute-strings, "what are you going to do?"

"You and I have done with society-made values," I answered; "we will leave Sorrento to-morrow morning."

"What will Vaini say . . .?"

"After what has happened I dare not wait to know."

"And Mr. Marblehead . . .?"

"For once in his life, Mr. Marblehead will be left."

"It all seems like the dream we dreamt together," murmured Guinevere, lifting her eyes to mine.

My hands were on her shoulders, and we were standing face to face. "It does," I answered quickly, "and when a dream comes true it is because the gods have spoken. The immortals kindling the sunrise cast no shadow."

IV.

For me the night that followed was one of wakeful hours and fitful sleep. Again and again I started from sinister presentiments. The chief of Neapolitan police and the genius of the vengeful Camorra lurked in awesome shadows, watching my approach, and shifting their stilettos to a firmer grasp. Vaini pursued me with shrill reproaches, and Mr. Marblehead's satanic cunning baffled my escape.

At last daylight came—the grey daylight of a cold rainy midwinter morning. I rang for coffee, my portmanteau was closed, the carriage was coming. It was my intention to drive with Miss Godfree along the Castellammare Road, ostensibly with that town as our destination, then turning to the right at St. Agnello, reach Amalfi, and thence the railway at La Cava. I doubted not that this elliptical flight would disconcert pursuit until we were beyond the Alps.

At the appointed hour of nine, Guinevere was ready, and we waited a feverish instant in the library. The sound of heavy carriage wheels on the gravel followed, and to my stupor an old-fashioned travelling vettura halted at the door, and a figure wrapped in voluminous overcoat and muffler alighted.

The front door was opened, and at the sound of Vaini's voice, bidding Pasquale let me know of his arrival, Guinevere and I were as revellers whose laughter dies at the cock-crow. Nothing save heroic measures could now avail, and motioning her to remain out of view, I went to meet Vaini. "Professor," I said, detaining him in the hall, "a deplorable accident has happened. A careless hand (ask me not whose) has given the nun some drops from one of the casquet vials."

"And she is dead!" ejaculated my tutor in a quivering voice, turning upon me a face of frightened horror.

"On the contrary, the Urohæmatoporphyria Cytheræ has restored her youth. She is a beautiful girl of twenty—shy as girls will be, and morbidly reluctant to be seen."

"Per le trippe del diavolo," he cried furiously, "by the devil's intestines, who has done this?"

"Vaini," I answered, laying my hand soothingly upon his arm, "I cannot tell

a lie . . . it was Orion Marblehead. More than this, he has planned to elope with her. I gather that in bygone years there was some tenderness between them."

"Friend of my soul," ejaculated the master, listening with a menacing pucker of the eyebrows, "you stab me to the heart."

"I have already provided for the confusion of their project," I added with determination. "Leave all to me. You will remain here and give Orion the dressing-down he deserves, while I take the girl hence, and place her beyond his reach."

The Professor's lips twitched with jealous rage, and there was in his voice a vitriolic note. His keen face, cruel with disappointed love, seemed imprint with the antique Roman type and fired with its elements of intellect, refinement, and savagery.

"Cattivo Pazzo!" he muttered under his breath. "Orion shall dance with the devil in hell."

At the words the front door was again opened by Pasquale, and Mr. Marblehead appeared, smiling unperturbed.

"You want to size things up and start in on a new deal," he said to Vaini. "The Holy Grail is yours—here it is, bottle-glass, and worth ten francs. But the lady is mine, and I have come for the goods."

The Professor had caught a glimpse of Miss Godfree and waited to hear no more. Springing past me with swift venom, he entered the library, and carefully selecting a vial from the casquet, emptied its contents into his hand and dashed them in a sparkling spray over Guinevere. Above his strident voice rang the sound of her mortal outcry. Her anguished eyes met mine, and there was a pathetic motion of her hands towards me as she shuddered and paled. In an instant her bright face changed to transparent whiteness—the face of a fairy grown suddenly old. The red-gold in her veins faded to silver, and clad in the dusky habiliments of St. Ursula, she stood before us, blighted and silent—an aged woman. It was so horrible a thing, that the room swam before me. In their glance of mutual aversion I read the sequel of Vaini's ill-fated courtship, and realised, as never before, that there is no force so vindictive as disappointed love. Vaini had smitten her as with lightning, inflicting a mischief greater than death.

Mr. Marblehead alone remained unmoved, looking on with the intent silence of the busy mind. His plain face grew radiant as though beyond the pitiful understanding of life he had discerned something sublime. "There must be a fibre of the Massachusetts forest in my backbone," he remarked with a hard lip, "or I could not have seen this and live. Professor, you have made her look like a five-year-old picture-hat, and now she will come with me, where she belongs. I guess we may all drop a trap-door on our emotions. Guinevere," he said, turning gravely to the nun, "this is a straight call, and you know I will always treat you white. To-morrow, thirty-four years ago, was to have been our wedding-day. Come with me. We are ready to start right now. Your portmanteau is here, and my only baggage is a snack-basket and a campstool."

Miss Godfree, once more become Sister Eunice, followed her faithful suitor without a word, and together they entered the professor's hired vettura and drove away, I knew not whither. Their departure brought a manifest relief to Vaini, who stood watching their going, with the Holy Grail in his hands. This object he lost no time in restoring to the ecclesiastical authorities, and received fulsome encomiums in the Italian press for its clever recovery.

At my urgent solicitation he removed the Casquet of Essentials from the library table. I represented to him the grievous consequences that might follow its use by a second careless hand if left thus within reach. I was too modest to mention my share in Miss Godfree's adventure, and I doubt not he died in the belief that it had been due to Orion's dangerous meddling. There are occasions when it is wise to hide one's light under a bushel. Months after the Professor's death, I found the casquet in the hiding-place where he had locked it away—the two vials he and I had employed for Miss Godfree still empty.

That evening my former tutor discoursed very earnestly upon what he termed the nun's "semblance" of rejuvenation. He pronounced it a curious hallucination and likened it to a rainbow floating over a cascade, the water alone being real and unchanged, however coloured with evanescent tints.

Mr. Marblehead's clumsy trifling had, he declared, merely rekindled that ephemeral spark of youth which sometimes lingers in the aged, but the figure before us was Eunice, not Guinevere, despite a transitory disguise. His comments upon my credulity in supposing it to have been otherwise were unusually caustic.

Vaini and I had been left alone but a few days, when the following notice appeared in a Neapolitan paper:

FOUND DROWNED AT CAPRI.

The bodies of a man and woman that were washed ashore on the landing beach last Thursday have been identified as those of Signor Marblehead Orion, an American millionaire, and of the English Signorina Godam Free. It is supposed that they threw themselves from the steamer *Faustine* while at anchor during the preceding night. The woman, who, strange to say, was an elderly person disguised in the garb of an Ursuline nun, was clasped in the man's embrace, the singular pair having perhaps eloped together.

So passed away my fellow-student, for whose scheme of life Vaini's intangible philosophy had proved an inadequate foundation.

His mind had aspired to the quest of a superlative treasure such as, in one semblance or another, is the aim of many. He had possessed it for a day, only to realise that the rarest ideals become commonplace at our earthly touch.

In his maturity he had known the unique experience of beholding again, still in the freshness of girlhood, the woman he had wooed in youth—to see her snatched in an instant to an infirm and graceless age.

What wonder if, in the grief of two such disillusions, a disciple of the Suicide Club turned to the tranquil and undying sea!

. . . . .

I am sometimes asked, now that Vaini is no more and his fame is climbing, what manner of man he was, and what were the methods that led to such supernatual craft. It is in answer to these queries that I have written this and previous narratives, showing, as far as the pupil may illustrate the master's complex mind, those principles of occult force which he found within the grasp of modern science. By thinkers of his own calibre Vaini is considered to have led the way in the unravelling of threads which, after ages of baffled study, are now perceived to connect us with the Unseen World.

I often meditate upon those hours wherein the master taught me to weigh the unreality of things. Sitting in his study this Christmas, with the objects that he loved about me, I seem to see beyond my blazing fire the sunbeams of those

"The tranquillity and vividness of monastic association linger about these walls as a ghost story clings to a haunted house."

meteoric days. Beside me on his table is the Casquet of Essentials, with whose contents I have never again ventured to experiment. Yonder is his set of amber chessmen, marked with the arms of le Grand Monarque, and on the wall hangs Guinevere's ivory lute.

Here, in Vaini's garden, the roses the Jesuits planted half a century ago still lift themselves upon the cloister buttress with a shy caress. They are of a stock of extraordinary antiquity, popularly descended from roses that flourished at Capri and Ischia before Parthenope and Pæstum were known—in days when Poseidon was young and made love to the beautiful daughters of men. Years ago, at first sight of them I bethought me that in ploughing old fields we may turn up the seeds of celestial flowers. Nameless, I have named these roses *Toujours ou Jamais*, in remembrance of that which Guinevere and I agreed should be Forever —and which scarce outlived the brilliance of a day. Above the monks' pergola a yellow trumpet creeper waves its flaming tendrils in profane exuberance, as though after mediæval centuries this tiny span of earth has not yet lost the glamour of its Golden Age. Bend as they may, its paths all lead to aspects of living beauty, and however short, they are more suggestive than many a lifetime. Their witchery holds a meaning beyond the significance of the actual world. The tranquillity and vividness of monastic association linger about these walls as a ghost story clings to a haunted house. In this Villa Sirena, whose very name is music, I seem to hear again that sweet-sung cantilena—as it were a fugitive chord, linking some rapturous memory with the poesy of nature. Deep in the night's heart phantom footsteps come and go.

On pleasant spring mornings I seek my garden at dawn—at the hour of perfumed darkness when in ancient days the nymphs awakened. The early sunshine, climbing these mountain sides with golden shoon, unfolds its opalescent mirror. An instant follows, splendid with awakening life, and brief as the echo of footsteps down the Eternal Silence. And often, thinking of the feet whose tread has smoothed these cloister walks, I remember the wan, grey figure of Eunice, telling her beads, and fancy behind her, leaning at the monastery well, a radiant and imperishable vision of Guinevere.

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A KISS OF DELILAH.

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

ILLUSTRATED BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, R.A.

I.

I WAS spending the Ottobrata of 1896 alone at the Monastery of Monte Cassino, not far from Naples. The festa dell' Ottobrata is the last Sunday of October, when in Italy, amid the witchery of autumnal pathos, people go forth into the country to take leave of the dying summer. It is a pagan day, kept pagan through all the monkish centuries, and whoever has witnessed it must have realised how deep a pagan significance underlies the festivals of Italy. There is often some faint survival of the measured classic dance, an instinctive libation poured to Bacchus, and a rural promenade—last relic of Eleusinian processions—to the groves Diana loved. The Ottobrata has come to be a day of forest meditation, spent amid the redwood's beautiful decay. Its charm is incensed with the fine odour of fallen leaves, and to the humblest imagination the flaming sunset rekindles for an instant a semblance of the transfigured Past. The close of such a day is the turning of an illuminated page.

During the preceding weeks I had been with Professor Vaini at his Villa Sirena, assisting in the completion of a mechanism he called our Penumbra, thereby associating it with that occult shade which lies beyond the things of earth. That shade, he knew, could be penetrated provided within the intellectual workshop some artifice could be contrived so keen as to become susceptible of telepathic photography. This perfected mesmerism demanded the invention of a reflector of such psychical delicacy as to reveal and record the consciousness of another mind, whether near or remote. It was to flood unknown darks with a gleam as far beyond our ordinary ken as in microscopic studies ultra violet surpasses visible light, and upon the reflector of this clarified vision to project telepathic negatives. Brain evolution was to reveal itself like the mutation of a kaleidoscope, and the mental spectrum was to show the irised rings of thought, as the solar spectrum defines those of colour. Scientifically speaking, he called it a compound telautoscope. Its exquisite surface had been so refined that it faintly recorded the distant voices that are for ever whispering, and which our physical sense is not attuned to hear. It was indeed a masterful conception to control those frail bonds that join life with life and Past with Present. Now

all was ready; the reflector shone like a soap-bubble, its *antennæ* were charged with nerve-fluid, its centre of electric gravity was determined. What type of experimental subject, I wondered, would Vaini select?

On that Sunday morning, October 25th, 1896, the Neapolitan police awoke to discover that a murder of unusual atrocity had been committed the previous evening at 31, Via Amadeo. During the afternoon popular interest, which in a city steeped in vice takes small heed of homicide, became excited over the details of the crime which had ended Saverio Cinquedea's life. There were dramatic and conflicting circumstances which so effectually baffled the chattering authorities that on the following day several newspapers gravely suggested that Camorra alone could adequately strengthen the arm of Justice. The victim was a dealer in antiques and Renaissance objects, aged 39, of good means, the lower part of his house being his curiosity shop. The entresol was occupied by him alone—bedroom in front, office at the rear. It was in this office that the crime had been committed. On the upper floor lived his wife with their boy Beato, aged eight, and the child's nurse. Above lodged two women servants. Two salesmen, a book-keeper, and an office-boy came every work-day at eight in the morning to open the shop, and it was in attempting to rouse his padrone that the lad stumbled over his dead body.

The antiquary was lying on his back, dressed in his familiar suit of broadcloth, and the autopsy showed thirteen stabs in the body and five on the left forearm. His protruding tongue indicated that he had been so tightly gripped by the collar from behind that strangulation would have prevented any outcry. His watch was in his fob-pocket, the gold links in his cuffs, and one hundred lire in his purse. Robbery was not therefore the motive, and in his breast-pocket was a note-book containing papers of no special importance which had not been disturbed. The body was bathed in blood, which had splashed high upon the wall. On the inner side of the office door a bloody hand had rested, smearing the white paint with finger-prints. It seemed probable that upon his return home at about half-past ten, to which the porter of the Hotel Paradiso testified, he had let himself in by a latch-key, extinguished a lamp, and entered his entresol office leaving the hall in darkness. He had lighted a candle in his room, exchanged his shoes for a pair of slippers, and opened a newspaper. At that moment he was set upon by some one of powerful physique, who, clutching him from behind by the coat-collar, inflicted the first two or three wounds on the right side of the neck, severing an artery. The unfortunate man had apparently wrenched himself partly free, and, with outstretched hands, had sought to clutch his assailant's blade. Curiously, his left arm alone had been lacerated. The wounds on his body would have killed three men, and the surgical experts declared that the attack had been made with such rapidity and skill that not more than two minutes had elapsed between the first blow and the collapse. The assailant must have been sprinkled with the blood that leaped from so many wounds, and on the stairs were footprints and finger-marks of one feeling his way down in the dark.

Public suspicion had quickly fastened upon the dead man's widow, Delilah Cinquedea. It was notorious that, though domiciled under the same roof, they lived apart on bad terms. A month before the murder ten thousand francs had been stolen from the antiquary's writing-table, and he had violently accused her of the theft. The wife had been heard to answer, with a scream of fury, that she wished her husband dead. She was handsome, reputed a woman with a past, and it was surmised that Saverio's declared resolve to turn her and their child from his door had to do with her adventures.

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"An office-boy came every work-day at eight in the morning to open the shop, and it was in attempting to rouse his padrone that the lad stumbled over his dead body."

Some such brief notice I had read in the *Messagero*, when, four days after, came a letter from Professor Vaini informing me that the Judge of first investigation, having the powers of an English Coroner, had authorised the scientific analysis he wished to make conjointly with the inquest. "Carissimo," wrote Vaini, "you have been applying yourself too much to shadowy thoughts. Give yourself a fortnight's relaxation. Join me (to-morrow if possible) at the Grand Hotel, and we will uncover the intrinsic secret of life." It would have been ungracious, not to say ungrateful, to refuse, and the next afternoon found me with my former tutor.

The Professor had made an end of his vegetarian luncheon, and, erect and agile, despite the burden of seventy years, was pacing up and down his sitting-room as I entered. His first word took me aback.

"Carissimo," he began, seizing my hand and looking in my face with a mischievous smile, "you have never had a love-affair—and that is wrong, because every man should taste once of that elixir. It keeps the heart a-bloom. It is not too late, and I have summoned you to an opportunity that is unique. The case against Delilah Cinquedea is overwhelming - motive, opportunity, means, all are present. She is clever, fine-looking, well mannered, and fascinating. Of course she is in prison, the enormous bail of fifty thousand francs not being forthcoming. It is upon her that I wish to test the Penumbra, which should read her mind like an open book. But first a little suavity is necessary to bring her out of the distress and exhaustion wherein she has circled these last days. I am myself too agitated for this, therefore I wish you to go as a good Samaritan, with wine and roses and the oil of gentle words, to bind up her wounds. Tranquillise for me this frightened woman, and when her mind is calm and responsive, we will make the experiment of the age. Present yourself in the skin of a sympathetic admirer. Make yourself agreeable—Malandrino amabile!—and you will be asked to warm both hands at the fire."

The Professor talked on, painting as usual with a broad brush and adding fine lights with a diamond. "In spite of our ephemeral contact with modern ideas," he added, "Naples remains the centre of classic and mediæval crime. It still has its Eleusinian Mysteries, and these are often a prelude to the knife. You must be careful to avoid what has happened to me—or worse."

"What has happened to you?" I exclaimed.

"On leaving the Police Office yesterday, its chief threw his arms about me, and invoked a blessing. Half-way here I missed the gold chronometer you gave me—the watch-chain was cut. It is not so bad as leaving a Cardinal's presence in the old days, and being done to death on the stairs. 'Friend of my soul,' he murmured, 'I shall never forgive you if you allow yourself to receive a *coltellata* in the ribs.'"

Persuaded that the sealed gates were about to unfold and disclose the hidden, hoary secret, and believing the Professor's latest mechanism to be the crowning miracle of the century, I waited only to obtain a Police authorisation to enter the Cinquedea house, whither I immediately directed my steps.

The Galleria Cinquedea, as its owner styled his shop, was familiar to me. I had often made purchases there, and several times, happening to visit it in Saverio's absence, had been received by his wife. Upon presentation of Vaini's order I was at once admitted, and allowed to pass from room to room, where every object was *in situ*. The house had suddenly become a place of sinister stillness. I first examined the hall, where stood a Roman statue of Apollo holding a lyre. On the leg was a russet stain where the departing assassin had

laid his bloody fingers. On the hall door and beside the staircase were other such marks, and the knob of the office door was a dull red, where a blood-wet hand had closed it. I went to the chamber in which the crime had been committed, and saw the dead man's shoes kicked aside by those trampling feet, a chair overthrown in that furious scuffle, the wall spotted as high as my hand could reach. Here was the writing-table from which, a month earlier, ten thousand francs had disappeared. It was noteworthy that for a year past Saverio had taken his meals at a restaurant, avowing a wholesome fear of his household medicine-chest.

Above were Signora Cinquedea's deserted bedroom, sitting room, small dining room and, overlooking the garden, a chamber occupied by her boy and his nurse. In the Signora's apartments were a Venetian mirror, a painting of herself in fancy dress as the Biblical Delilah, an imitation Louis XVI. bed, an ivory arci-lute of extraordinary beauty, a dressing-table with the usual paraphernalia of flacons, brushes, and étuis, and over all the florid Italian colour and decoration.

The theory of the prosecution, as set forth in a preliminary *procès verbal* Vaini had put in my hands, was that Delilah Cinquedea had secreted herself in her husband's entresol in anticipation of his return. That, armed with a stiletto the slender blade of which inflicted wounds four inches deep, she had attacked him with a swordswoman's skill and with a physical power equal to that of a strong man. That, the attack ended, she had gone downstairs to the basement kitchen, that there she had cleansed herself, burnt her bloodstained clothing, and made away with the stiletto That she had then returned to her room, and retired to bed, and had risen the next morning as usual, taken coffee, and talked with her child. That, upon the announcement of Saverio's death, she had burst into a flood of hysterical sobbing which the police downstairs heard and mistook for loud laughter.

I have mentioned having occasionally spoken with Signora Cinquedea at her husband's gallery. I was now so persuaded of her physical inability to commit the crime that I resolved to visit her in gaol and inform her that I would go bail for her, and that she should be free that evening. My solicitor received a cheque for fifty thousand francs and promised to meet me at the prison in an hour with the official release.

I was shown into a room at the place of detention, where the accused was seated at a table on which lay books and a work-basket. Before her stood the nurse Agnese, to whom she was giving orders for the care of her boy. Both turned as I was shown in, and I noticed in the maid's face the cunning slave-look of the Italian domestic. She evidently knew me, and showed her prominent teeth in a stealthy smile.

The Signora Cinquedea rose at sight of me, and, dismissing the maid, advanced with outstretched hands. In her fine brown eyes lurked the immemorial look of the hunted, as she fixed her gaze upon me with eager surprise "You are sorry for me!" she exclaimed, "are you not? and let me swear to you at once that, through all this horror, I have a pure desire for the truth."

Her profile had the classic grace of a Greek coin, and athwart the October twilight her Venetian hair caught a reflected glow from the crimson heart of the wood fire. She might have been Artemis, the huntress, standing in statuesque poise, self-possessed and self-sufficient, uplifted above the wicked and ignoble things of earth

"You have not forgotten me," I answered, placing in her hands a posy of the roses that grew at the Villa Sirena, and which in these later years I have

named *Toujours ou Jamais*. "I heard what has happened from Professor Vaini, whose gifts will all be required to unravel this tangled web. I am convinced of your innocence—for you cannot be guilty. Ere the coming month is past, I shall have cleared you before the world."

At the words new hope and life and colour came into Dehlah's face, and she lifted her radiant wet eyes to mine. "I am not afraid," she whispered; "I can think like a man. I swear to you by the bread and the wine, by my belief in salvation, *by my hope that my child may live*—that I am innocent."

In after days I often recalled Saverio's widow as I then beheld her, with the tears glistening in her eyes. She was neat-handed and fine-faced, and her figure bore the voluptuous classical contour. Perhaps a drop of untamed faun's blood leaped in her veins. It was one of my fancies, observing the faint flush beneath the sunburn, that she kissed a pink rose every morning. In her ears were heavy gold rings encircling a tiny coral twist that averts the evil eye. The year before she had told me of her joy in the al fresco life, delighting in her half-tropical roof-garden that overlooked Virgil's tomb, and the plain where stands Pompeii and the Roman Surrentum across the bay; for in Italy, she aptly said, the past never fades wholly from view.

II.

The next day passed in further investigation and in reading police reports, and I did not see Vaini until we sat down that evening to an over-late supper. He presently remarked that already the Neapolitan Camorra was obstructing the inquest and preparing to block the trial. Then, with a quiet smile, he added: "I have just learned, through a private inquiry office, that after the disappearance of the ten thousand francs from Cinquedea's desk, his wife paid off several pressing debts. I suppose," he added, "that you have seen her to-day."

"I saw her late yesterday," I answered, "and she wrote this morning, asking me to lunch to-morrow."

"To lunch!" echoed the Professor, greatly astonished.

"Yes," I replied, enjoying his surprise; "you bade me act the good Samaritan, so I have gone bail for her, and she is temporarily lodged at the Hotel Paradiso round the corner."

When Vaini swore it was a good mouth-filling oath that rang and rattled ere it died. Perhaps it was well for the harmonies between us that I was able to divert him with an item of interest.

The antiquary's whereabouts during the last afternoon and evening of his life was a circumstance of obvious importance, and at the end of a week was still unknown. Where had he dined? In whose company had he spent those last hours? Whence had he come at ten o'clock that evening to let himself into the deadly ambush where a figure crouched upstairs in the darkness?

The police had shown me Saverio's pocket book, among its contents being a fresh newspaper cutting on which were three tiny red-ink marks, and the thought flashed upon me that herein lay the fixing of an appointment.

Count the letters of the first line=6.
Count down to the 7th line (7th day of the week)=Saturday.
Count down to the 24th line (or day of the month)=24th.
"At six o'clock, Saturday, 24th."

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"The Captain was manifestly ill at ease, and looked nervously about as I indicated the fresh stains on the wall and the spot where the dead body lay."

Were this a trustworthy conjecture, it would show that, shortly before the crime, Saverio received this summons in a form that, if intercepted, would convey no meaning to his wife.

"It sounds ingenious," growled my former tutor, not quite recovered from the shock of my interpretation of the good Samaritan. "But it is beside the mark, and to-morrow morning we will take better aim. The Penumbra has been made ready in the room where the crime was committed, and there we will test it upon Gennaro Riva, a retired Captain of the Italian Army, whom the police hold as accessory. You will question him, whilst I, moving about the room, will direct our instrument. It matters little what line your inquiry takes, since what I seek is the thought at the back of his head."

The next morning the Professor and I were in Cinquedea's office with the apparatus in readiness, when a police official announced "Il Capitano Riva." A man of forty, slightly under six feet, of olive complexion, and thick short moustache, entered, walking smartly and holding himself well. He was good-featured—the style of head barbers place in their shop windows. As he seated himself I became conscious of a faint aromatic odour of musk. Vaini stepped aside and looked out upon the garden, while I plied the Captain with questions. Presently the Professor moved to a bookcase behind the accused, and directed the sensitive retort towards him.

The Captain was manifestly ill at ease, and looked nervously about as I indicated the fresh stains on the wall, and the spot where the dead body lay.

"And the Signora Cinquedea," I inquired, shifting the line of attack, "how many years have you known her?"

"A speaking acquaintance for ten years or less."

"Is it true that several years ago her husband forbade you his house?'

"It is not true."

"Two nights ago," I said, fixing him with a straight-flung Italian gesture, "the Signora's private box in her bedroom was broken open, and a receipt found for something deposited in the bank. Yesterday that receipt was presented by a police official, and a pacquet of letters surrendered in exchange."

The Neapolitan's impassive face flushed as though I had struck him. "Those letters are mine," he answered, his eyes dilating with excitement; "they can only have been obtained through fraud."

"Compromising letters from you, for which Signora Cinquedea holds the receipt!" I retorted, laughing at our enemy. "This implies an intimacy which, in view of the murder of her husband, will have great interest for the jury."

Captain Riva listened in ominous silence, and his handsome face darkened. Had we been alone, I believe he would have leaped upon me.

"These letters," I continued, showing him the pacquet, with its broken seals, "were placed in my hands last evening, and have been read. There are allusions to a duel fought by you nine years ago, on behalf of Cinquedea's wife. Tell me the motive of that duel."

"The quarrel was over a card-table, and nowise concerned the Signora, though she felt a deep interest in it, because she knew both combatants."

"Your opponent," I continued, "was Count Scarafaggio, a professional card-sharper. Was he also 'a speaking acquaintance' of Cinquedea's wife?"

A faint smile moved the lips under that dark moustache, as Riva answered: "Count Scarafaggio is Signora Cinquedea's brother."

"From the allusions in your letters," I observed, "I inferred him to be her lover. There is no mention in them of a card-table dispute, but of something more emotional."

"It is true that there was something behind the altercation over cards. The Signora had become very angry with Count Scarafaggio, having detected him in a dalliance with one of her maids."

"So angry," I added, "that she insisted upon your fighting him, and resorted to the old trick of a game of cards, behind which there is always a woman. She was so furious with Scarafaggio—her brother, you ask me to believe—that she wished him dead. Was there not beneath all this a ferocious jealousy of her own?"

The Italian made a miniature passato with his walking-stick at a heart-shaped flower in the carpet pattern, but answered nothing.

"You took Delilah from him, or he took her from you—which was it?" I asked, hazarding a flight of fancy.

At this climax, much to my annoyance, Vaini interrupted our dialogue by that expressive Italian movement which signifies *Basta*, enough.

The Captain gone, I threw wide a window to clear the room of the musk odour with which he scented himself, and, before casting my eyes upon the sensitive plate Vaini held out to me, I exclaimed, "Whatever the Penumbra may say, that is the man who killed Saverio!" Then, glancing down, I deciphered, amid a spider's web of phrases, these gleaming brain-words:

" . . . . trap to bring me to this room . . . brave front . . . what are they but a pair of charlatans? . . . how does he know that? . . . if only a few of our *galantuomini* were here! . . . not another so soon . . . lover, brother . . . brother, lover. . . .

"You bedevilled him with so many lines of attack," grumbled the Professor, "hence this confusion. Your luncheon hour approaches, and I wish you to arrange that the Signora comes here to-morrow, upon whatever errand you please. Next time you shall direct the tablet, and I the inquiry. I quite share your opinion that Scarafaggio is a lover in the travesty of a relative."

As he finished speaking I glanced again upon the Penumbra, and beheld that it was flashing like a kaleidoscope in a fit. Could it be that we had passed unbidden beyond the borderland of human things and were arousing unknown and dangerous forces?

Signora Cinquedea breakfasted—or, more properly speaking, dined—at noon, and twelve o'clock struck as I was shown into the dining-room of her apartment at the Hotel Paradiso, where a table laid for two was spread with the Italian *antepasto*. A bottle of golden Episcopio and one of ruby Chambertin stood sentry between the olives and sardines, and my posy of *Toujours ou Jamais* roses, the only flowers in the room, was beside them.

My beautiful hostess entered smiling with serene amiability, unperturbed by her tragic situation, yet with a subdued and saddened look—a shadow on the brow of Athena. She was dressed in pale fragrant drapery, and was no longer yesterday's type of a woman waiting upon the accidents of fate. She thanked me again in a fluent phrase for her temporary freedom, and there was in her utterance a subtle intonation and cadence that seemed the gamut of a sweet, deep nature.

"And now," she continued, "come to table. The *fritata* is served; let us drink the wine of friendship. Be mine a world of peace and humble plenty—of music and your roses. Above all, no love. What is the love you men are for ever vaunting but a base passion, selfishness, and a jealous vanity that turns sour at every change in the wind? I suppose," she added, looking up with a wicked

smile, "you talk your light-hour love to all the loveless girls that listen. *Detto, fatto!* no sooner said than done."

"On the contrary," I replied, piqued at this persiflage, "I belong to a Thinkers' Club, the 'Chosen Few' whose business it is to realise ideals. My holidays are devoted to the study of sidelights upon curious things, and I am as shy of love-making as Joseph."

"How many belong to your Club?" asked Delilah.

"The Chosen Few are Professor Vaini and I."

"I know Vaini," observed the lady, as a *rizotto* was placed before us. He is what the French call *une boite à surprises.* Be not vexed at my imperfect appreciation of him and his sidelights. To be so wise you must read much. I do not care for books; so many of them are what Englishwomen call *rot!*"

"You are so far right," I answered, "that a library does not hold more truth than a wild forest: I have never known my own mind so well as at twenty, when I lived one summer in the woods and caught my trout in mountain streams and baked my potatoes in the ashes."

"And now," she interrupted, pouring me out a cup of black coffee, "you cling to those tags and labels the world ties to our skirts. To think that I should be sitting alone with such a rake-hell!" Then suddenly her banter ceased, and with great earnestness, her dark eyes half a-dream, she murmured, "It is because I feel safe with you, I who am a prisoner in the enemy's camp; who, in the midst of this misery, can say with St. Paul, I die daily."

"The good book says, Peace be to thee, fear not, thou shalt not die"

"May your words be prophetic!" she exclaimed; "if I do not weep, it is because such words ring in my soul."

"It should still further encourage you," I said in confidential *sotto voce,* "that I have formed my own theory as to the crime. I return presently to your house for its verification. If I am right in believing that Saverio was killed by *two* assailants, both of whom left the house immediately after its commission. . . ."

The Signora listened with so sudden a change of expression that the next words faltered unspoken. Her lips hardened and her eyes glowed with tragic consciousness. She rose abruptly, and, walking to the mantelpiece, lighted a cigarette. Turning, she faced me with her accustomed calm, and said in a quick low voice, "I have heard many theories, and some," she added with an ironical laugh that rang with bitterness, "are much more silly than others."

Then suddenly, casting aside her cigarette and her defiance, she said: "A month hence, when this horror has ended, you will think more gently of me. When life draws to a close and twilight falls upon our little labour—we remember its morning. It is so with our attachments—when the storm is past, Time, the consummate artist, refines and endears our humblest memories."

My thought took wing at the light in her face—the light of the Italian afternoon that touched her with its benediction. And behind the eyes that looked so deeply into mine—behind the words a quiver on her lips—I divined a subtle secret silence . . . like a bird's heart beneath the folded wings.

On leaving the hotel I returned to the Galleria to resume the task of piecing together circumstantial evidence. Assuming that Vaini's apparatus gave its testimony in favour of the accused, her defence would be vastly strengthened by a background of fact. The bloodstains led from Saverio's room to the foot of the stairs, where they parted, one line continuing to the kitchen, the other leading to the front door. The impression grew upon me that the injuries to the body, strangulation from behind and stabs in front, showed a double attack. The

antiquary had been seized by the back of the collar, the same assailant holding his right hand, Cinquedea's left arm only having been lacerated. The second assailant, who confronted him, had delivered a succession of stabs in the region of the heart, and the swift attack had been executed with the violence of tremendous passion. If I were right in suspecting Captain Riva, who was the other assassin?

At this half-spoken ejaculation, I became conscious of a cat-foot presence behind me, and turning, beheld what John Bunyan terms "an ill-favoured one" watching my movements. The newcomer was a man of forty, well dressed, and with as hang-dog an expression as I have ever seen. His furtive scrutiny changed to a fawning smile as he introduced himself with Neapolitan volubility as the Signora Cinquedea's brother, Count Scarafaggio. He added with unctuous suavity that, being aware of the service I had rendered his sister, he was impatient to present his thanks.

There was a faint white scar on his cheek such as the cut of a whip might leave, and the thought came to me that, in the death struggle, Saverio had struck him with the rattan walking-stick found on the office floor.

"I am persuaded of the lady's innocence," I answered, "for the proof is clear that the crime was committed by two persons, both strong men like yourself, who, their work done, left the house by different exits. The woman, had she made the attack, would have returned whence she came. Why should she wish to go out into the street? But no stains lead upstairs from the antiquary's room. The two men come down feeling their way in the dark. One touches the statue, and, thus learning his own position, makes for the door. The other takes the direction you are looking, to the service stair, washes himself in the kitchen, and lets himself out by the servants' gate. . . . What is the matter? You seem troubled . . . you are pallid as this marble."

Count Scarafaggio's white, frightened face was telling the truth. "Povero Saverio," he stammered, "you bring that horrible scene so vividly before me. But now, I go. I have interrupted you too long."

III.

Delilah had mentioned at my leave-taking that she purposed returning that afternoon to her own residence, from which the police were withdrawn. I told her of Vaini's wish to perfect our line of defence by asking some questions, to which she reluctantly consented.

"Vaini is a puffed-out fraud," she muttered, and spat venomously upon the ground.

The maid Agnese was in the closed curiosity shop when I arrived next day, and with her the boy, Beato, playing hide-and-seek about the statue that still bore the imprint of Saverio's blood. Of this child his mother was wont to say, "I love him so dearly, that in some other life, ages ago, surely he was my lover!" With humorous malice I advanced to Agnese, and, shaking her warmly by the hand, gave her the secret Mano Nera grip of the Neapolitan Camoristi. She started at the touch, and at the same instant I perceived about the child Beato the musk odour which Capitano Riva carried as a fox bears his scent.

"Why is it," I queried with a kindly smile, "that whereas all Christians uncover in presence of the dead, Justice puts on a black cap before those sentenced to die?"

"Before our blessed Virgin," stammered the maid with trembling lips, "I am innocent. Can you slay me, yet save your own soul alive?"

Amused at the effect of my Camorra hand-grip, I asked abruptly, "Tell me something of Count Scarafaggio. Are he and your lady related?"

"Signore," replied Agnese with affected candour, "I have never told a lie. If I am to be killed, let me die in the open. I will avow to you there is a *simpatia* between them."

"You mean they are lovers?"

"Blessed Maddalena! does not every woman wish to burn her fingers at the flame?"

"Yet the Count told me they are half brother and sister."

"Quel brutto scalzacane—that ugly, barefoot dog that only gave me five francs last Christmas!"

"No matter. But what makes this child smell so of musk?"

"What would you? is it not his nature?"

"Why should it be his nature to smell like Capitano Riva?"

As I spoke, a sound of music rang through the smitten house—Delilah was touching the arci-lute I had noticed in her parlour. The piece she played was *Adelaide*, delightfully familiar, and never have I heard it thrilled with a touch more silver-tongued. The chords seemed richer and more responsive than ever before, and on that autumnal afternoon the refrain seemed a reverberance of spiritual things. It is a melody of appealing significance and clustering embroidery, now rendered with a poetic appreciation that gave it a sense wholly new. I realised, as never before, the possibility of thinking and speaking in music.

I was riveted by the charm of her expression. The true virtuoso wakes unimagined significance in old masterpieces, and I listened with delight to a technique that heightened the intimate light and shade. In that instant's rapture I forgot the inharmonies of the hour, and knew that memories long dreaming had awakened.

Suddenly I realised that she was revealing qualities within herself. The well-known romance assumed a startling import, and became Delilah's self-interpretation. Never before have I caught so distinctly the phantom chord that whispers from the soul of music. I felt that she was pleading, entreating with the voice of *Adelaide*, and that within its cantilena her heart was speaking. For the first time I learned what is meant by the Call of the Song, and asked myself if our fateful experiment might not be bearing me beyond the limitation of accustomed things. It was a mystical summons as distinct as any Vaini's mechanisms had ever produced, and I straightway went upstairs to the music-room.

I halted at sight of the minstrel seated against the tapestried wall, turned a little from me with the great lute ringing beneath her touch. In that instant's pause my eyes rested upon a large portrait of the Signora Cinquedea fancifully habited as the Biblical Delilah, in floating draperies, with bared throat, the woman of the Valley of Sorek whom Samson loved. And my fancy flew to those days when Baal-zebub, yet unconquered, descended to earth and walked in the Syrian moonlight with the beautiful daughters of men. The Testament dwells with recurrent emphasis upon those groves, beloved of Moloch, wherein danced the tawny girls and the darker Bedawi, the Philistines and Amalekites and bronzed women of the land of Cush. Whoever reads those brief paragraphs catches between the lines the flash of necklaces and tinkle of bangles and the rhythm of mountain-songs. They were playmates of demi-gods, those women with lithe arms and half-bared limbs, not kneeling, but erect, heedless of perturbations about death and heaven, content to take life as a fine coin stamped with a die we cannot change. The beat of harp-strings and whisper of flutes and pulse of timbrels thrills in our

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"I halted at sight of the minstrel seated against the tapestried wall, turned a little from me, with the great lute ringing beneath her touch."

hearing. "Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die," is the song of those women. And among them is Delilah, and at sight of the strong man, the smiter and slayer, she cries, "Surely thou art a son of Dagon, our God before whom we dance!" Whereat the strong man laughed and drew her to him, unresisting. My vision of the sun-land lasted but an instant—then the human Delilah stood before me with eyes intently fixed upon mine.

"Did he love you?" I asked, still half a-dream.

"No," answered the Signora Cinquedea, speaking I know not of whom; "he cared for none but himself."

This unexpected answer recalled me from Biblical ages. "How strange," she added, "that through my playing I heard your voice calling, '*Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die*'! But of whom did you speak when you asked, '*Did he love you?*'"

"Of your dead husband," I answered, embarrassed at the recollection of my fervent imaginings. "And as to whom were you answering?"

"Of Saverio, of course," she replied with flushed cheeks and very bright eyes. "Now I must go; Vaini awaits me, and I must tread my winepress alone. He seeks to thrust himself between me and you; but the time is coming when we shall remember his malice as a mere footnote to this tragedy. In pledge whereof take from me this little silver cup—less the cup than its engraved words, *Amicizia è Fedelità*." Then, swiftly placing her hands on my shoulders and raising herself, she whispered: "If the worst befall . . . if in life a day comes when the threads now woven together are severed . . . call me, however softly, in your hour of need . . . and, living or dead, I will come. *Addio;* join me in the garden in an hour."

I stationed myself unnoticed at a rustic table in the Cinquedea garden, where the Penumbra had been placed behind a spreading myrtle and out of sight of the Professor. I listened unseen to Signora Cinquedea's frosty greeting of her visitor, and, in considering how fine an intellectual duel this salutation prefaced, remembered Orion Marblehead's familiar dictum wherein he summed up an observation upon the gentle sex: "A woman is bound to squeal if you bite hard enough." I knew that my former tutor could be depended on to bite to the bone.

The lady spoke first, in a voice that trembled. "Am I a dog," she exclaimed, "that I must come to your whistle?"

"I am told," replied Vaini with unruffled amiability, "that hell is poorly lighted. So too is the story of Saverio's murder; but I am about to turn on a flashlight before which all but the logic of facts will disappear."

Having assured myself that the Penumbra revolved accurately upon its centre of gravity, I noiselessly extended its antennæ towards Delilah. I remember casting an admiring glance at our beautiful mechanism, whose spheres and ellipses were an illustration of Vaini's well worn proposition that the realm of an idea may usually be defined by a geometric figure.

"To begin with," observed the Professor, rubbing his hands with bonhomie, "it has been shown that on the night of the crime you were impatient to get the maids upstairs to their attic. You told the cook and housemaid their noise in the kitchen disturbed you. Although the hour was not yet ten they withdrew, leaving you alone on the ground-floor. Was it your object to be able to admit your husband's assassin and guide him to his ambush?"

"All the world knows," answered the accused in a low furious voice, "that the assassin must have been hidden in the shop, and that his motive was a

private vendetta. I never doubted he was brother to some girl Saverio had trifled with."

"Do you know the murderer's name?"

"As well ask me where the tides go, or what becomes of the stars at dawn."

"Suppose I call him Gennaro Riva?"

"You may suppose whatever foolishness you will."

"There are three death-shadows on the office wall. Shall we say that Scarafaggio was with him?"

"What has Count Scarafaggio to do with it?" cried the lady.

"That is what you are here to explain. Is he your brother?"

"My foster-brother," she corrected hastily.

"Not your lover . . . as well?"

Delilah sprang to her feet and began pacing up and down with the elastic smoothness of a feline. Through the screen of myrtle branches I could see her face of pale sinister calm like the set features of sculpture. I, too, felt a rising anger at the cruel rudeness of this interrogatory.

"My instinct was right," pursued Vaini in a jeering banter, while the Penumbra suddenly began reflecting with feverish haste.

Has the fool blabbed again! I read at the end of a sentence.

"Your words are insulting," answered the Signora, resuming her seat. "I shall not discuss such things with you."

"Wild animals," pursued the Professor philosophically, "distinguish their own kind one from another at a distance by the scent. A house-dog knows the scent of his master and of his master's children. To the keen animal sense the kindred-blood is always the same. Now, will you discuss why Capitano Riva moves in a musk odour of his own, and whether it is due to heredity that your child has the same peculiarity?"

Delilah sat silent, and the Penumbra flashed the words: *That musk-rat smell will ruin everything.*

"Ten years ago," resumed Vaini, speaking with a spice of bravura, "you obliged Capitano Riva to fight a duel with your foster-brother. You made choice of the Captain because he is a formidable swordsman, which the Count is not. In a stormy interview you enjoined upon Riva to kill Scarafaggio, and that he did his best to merit the favours he subsequently received from you is proved by the dangerous sword-thrust he inflicted."

"Count Scarafaggio," interposed the lady, "had compromised my maid Agnese, who was young and pretty then."

"That is to say," remarked the Maestro, "you had surprised Scarafaggio and your maid in a compromising situation, which roused in you a jealousy that only blood could appease. Why did you not discharge Agnese?"

"That would have been giving her to Count Scarafaggio out of hand," replied the Signora coldly.

"You preferred to keep her by you, almost in durance, a mark for those poisoned arrows one woman knows how to make ready for another. Since the duel, you have incited four attempts upon Scarafaggio's life. That the Count still lives is due to the Camorra which he has paid to protect him."

"Has this anything to do with the murder?" asked Delilah scornfully.

"You promised Scarafaggio forgiveness," replied Vaini, "upon his aiding Riva in the attack on your husband. When that attack began, you opened the door and stood looking on till it was finished. And now," he added, lifting both arms in a frenzied gesture, "if the soul of the murdered man, from remote Infinity, can

hear the summons of an earthly voice, I adjure him to give some token of the truth!"

I have now to record the most extraordinary phenomenon of all my tutor's experiments. The air suddenly tingled with electricity, and the reflector of the Penumbra, after flashing a brief sentence, was shattered like a mirror struck by a bullet. I saw the child Beato come running towards his mother, who rose with the cry of one in a spasm of pain, and at the same instant Beato fell headlong. The objects about me seemed reeling. Vaini stood gasping as though asphyxiated, the maid Agnese staggered and fled. Looking upon our marvellous apparatus, I saw that it was split, bent, and shivered out of all shape. What supernatural force, I wondered, had thus smitten it to atoms? The effect upon us who stood near resembled that of a moderate submarine explosion upon fish. Delilah lifted her boy to his feet, and Vaini came to me, his face grey with excitement.

"Are you hurt, Maestro?" I asked, as he cautiously raised the fragments of his invention.

"Hush!" he whispered, aghast at his own achievement. . . . "It was another voice . . . *it was the murdered man speaking!*"

We stood silent, spell-bound, gazing upon the debris of our failure. Then he gathered the riven and twisted parts and tossed them into a clump of oleander. Drawing me aside he said: "One word before I go. At the mandate of the Camorra, an order has been issued by the Court forbidding me to continue this investigation. That order will be served upon me this afternoon, probably accompanied by a police notice to leave Naples. But neither order touches you, and I think you can remain without much risk. Only be very careful that no one gets at you with a stiletto. I ask you to stay because my heart is set upon solving the Cinquedea crime. There is now but one way to success—you must spend a few months in Naples and marry Saverio's widow."

"Vaini," I interrupted angrily, "I have stood a great deal of nonsense, but this——"

"Have you no pride in your work?" retorted the Professor, taking my hand in his and regarding me with a smile of intelligent persuasion. "Is yours the shallow nature that recoils before a pebble in the way? Would you stoop to folly at the instant of success? No, I have a presentiment that next month you will rejoin me at the Villa, bringing tidings of great joy."

I had been far from pleased with my tutor's interrogatory, which was brutal in method and unfair in its stratagems. I felt sincerely sorry for the accused woman, and more than ever doubted her guilt. Having lingered a moment to regain my composure, I presently perceived that Vaini had gone, Beato been comforted and dismissed, and Delilah . . .

Before me, at a little distance, amid the ground flame of jasmines and virgin lilies, was Delilah, kneeling upon a garden bench, her hands lightly clasped, her auburn hair turned golden in that dazzling sunlight. She was clad in a sang dieu crimson gown, against which her half-bared arms gleamed like silver, and I divined what fires ran in the veins of that splendid body. The Italian sunshine, like a shaft from the sun-god's quiver, laid its radiance on her face, and her look of silent adoration might have seemed an unconscious recurrence to the pagan worship of the sun. Once she threw her white arms out in passionate entreaty towards the freedom yonder, and tears glistened in her eyes. High upon the wall a thread of water issued from a marble lion's mouth, falling into a basin with the music of fairy bells. My throat was suddenly dry, my eyes curiously moist, and a swift impulse drew me towards this woman who stood alone, with all the world

against her. In what field, I wondered, were her thoughts; and a voice within me answered, "It is November, winter draws on, the birds are still, the roses dead. What if a winter rose should bloom, and some stray love-bird sing in December!"

I stood thus gazing, as lost perhaps in my musings as she in hers. The lurid tragedy wherein she moved, however guiltless, was outlined before me. Was it for nothing that we had been thus suddenly and strangely drawn together, or could we awake and keep the crystal of our dream unshattered? Was I stretching forth eager hands only to clutch a shadow—only to remember the magnetic summons of her music with the vague regret of a kiss that ended in a tear?

Suddenly she beheld me, and rising, stood against the jade background of a cluster of laurel—a Daphne recalled from the laurel into life. The garden wall behind her was festooned with Spanish moss and columbine, and there were wild flower stains of amethyst on the greensward. The breath of June was on the lips of November, and I knew that it was the dreaming time of day. With a delicious air of ease and security, she beckoned me, and in suave Italian fashion said, "I always think of you as you came to me in my distress with hands overflowing with roses. You called them *Toujours ou Jamais.* A moment ago I was alone with my day-dream—that with to-morrow's sunset you and I might go *pour toujours* over the rim of the world."

"Are day-dreams wiser," I asked, "than their kindred of the night?"

Lightly, without answering, Delilah slipped her arm through mine, and I looked into the amber sunlight of her eyes as we strayed down the long garden walk together.

IV.

The following day I found on my breakfast-table a note from Delilah asking me to call that afternoon at three. I knew she would receive me upstairs in the music-room, and, having several unfinished observations to complete in the curiosity shop, I timed my arrival for two o'clock. Agnese admitted me, and, having done so, stepped out upon the portico and glanced up and down the quiet street. It flashed upon me that my unexpected arrival disconcerted some arrangement—that some one was expected in anticipation of my visit whose purpose might not be to my advantage. I shuddered to remember what had awaited Cinquedea beneath that roof three weeks before.

I had been but a moment alone, when a well-dressed and distinguished-looking stranger entered and closed the shop-door behind him. He bowed with courtly grace, and asked the favour of a moment's conversation. "Perhaps you do not know me," he began, with frank good nature.

"On the contrary If I am not mistaken, I saw you here a week ago: you are Chief of the Neapolitan Police."

"We look alike," he answered, with a deprecating wave of the hand. "The fact is, I am Chief of the Neapolitan Camorra. Not that I would do you mischief quite the reverse," he added reassuringly, "in token whereof behold this watch:" and he displayed Vaini's stolen chronometer.

"That watch," I said, "belongs to Professor Vaini He told me it had been lost, in the office of the Chief of Police."

"The Chief of Police," echoed my visitor with disgust, "is a man without a soul. He richly deserves to lose this, and I have brought it to be returned to its owner. I am sure you will not forget my honorarium?"

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"Once she threw her white arms out in passionate entreaty towards the freedom yonder, and tears glistened in her eyes."

"Certainly not," I assented; "tell me how much it is to be."

"I am about to do you a far greater service," he continued, taking a pinch of snuff, "than the return of this watch. If you linger in this house, or in Naples, and continue in this miserable murder coil, something disagreeable will befall. Your life is secure, but you might suddenly be transported to a remote fastness in the Apennines, where you would remain—the blessed saints alone can say how long—till interest in the Cinquedea crime had ended. Two personages whom you have bitterly angered, Riva and Scarafaggio, are not far hence with a couple of bravos. Without me," he added, flecking a grain of snuff from his waistcoat, "you would not leave this house alive to-day, though you might leave it manacled to-night for some unknown destination."

"But I am working with the authority and protection of the police," I ejaculated in astonishment.

"Signore," replied the Italian, lifting his hand as one who takes an oath, "it is but yesterday the Chief of Police exclaimed in my hearing of you and Vaini that he would no longer risk his immortal soul in the service of men who talk with Satan."

"I have no money about me," I said, remembering the meagre few hundred francs in my purse. "But give me the watch and tell me the amount of your fee, and you shall have my cheque before night."

"I never doubted," said my visitor with whole-hearted graciousness, "that your promise is as good as that of the Camorra. You will send me ten thousand francs, and you shall not be disturbed to-day by those who seek to do you mischief. But by to-morrow noon you must have left Naples."

"I am here," I observed coolly, "as the adviser of Signora Cinquedea, and shall remain—unless she bids me go."

The Chief of the Camorra returned his snuff-box to a side-pocket and eyed me with swift comprehension. "Or unless she goes with you," he murmured with an insinuating smile. Then rising, he made me a bow and departed.

To be again in Delilah's presence gave me a curious thrill. On the floor sat Beato, and before him a basket of fruit—bunches of grapes, dusk-red apples, and great yellow pears. He was a handsome boy, wild-faced as his mother, but darker—almost as dark as Capitano Riva. Mirthful, yet wistful-eyed as a little faun, he needed only the panther skin and tipped ears to seem a boy-faun revelling amid the votive fruit of classic altars.

"I am glad you have come," said the faun's mother, motioning to a seat beside her. "We will smoke a little, and talk of pleasant things. For a day or two you have looked weary. Your studies with Vaini will age you before your time."

"Our studies," I replied, "are a realm I fain would never leave—a realm of shaded calm, of spirit calling to spirit across the twilight of centuries, of altitudes yet unmeasured."

"One might think you were talking of Rosamond's bower," interrupted the lady, with malicious mirth. "But I remember that would be no more to you than the murmur of a sea we have read of but never sailed. Tell me frankly, when this foul storm is past, what shall you do, or whither go?"

"You will need repose when that day comes," I answered; "and I am as heartily weary as you can be of everything here. Suppose we spend a couple of months on the upper Nile, amid the silence of the Pharaohs. We should possess the gift that kings know not—a life wholly our own."

Delilah looked at me in a way that said things.

"Take heed," she exclaimed, with a rippling laugh. "Love, left uncared for, takes the first comer by the hand. What if in this forsaken place that fate were yours!"

"I should lead him," I replied, "to your roof-garden, and pluck for him the last amorous roses of summer."

"Saying silly things blisters the tongue," retorted the lady. "And yet," she added, stretching her arms as if to embrace the universe, "to think of gathering that rare bouquet . . . to look beyond the palm-trees and the centuries upon the altar of Osiris . . . to learn more of life than the taste of its shining dust . . . to gather something better than driftwood . . . to dig the burnt gold of poppies that bloomed in Cleopatra's garden . . . to watch the stars through fragrant, palpitating nights . . . the heart almost ceases beating for rapture. Would it not seem," she whispered, laying a magnetic hand on mine, "like a kiss of the gods?"

"It would be a kiss of Delilah," I gravely assented.

At that instant Agnese entered and handed her mistress a telegram, and placed what was left of our Penumbra on the table. I moved discreetly away to gaze on the long breakers rolling upon the silver beach, in silver silence. Overhead, athwart the ceiling, a wavering line of light flickered its reflection of the sunshine in the garden tank below. And I remembered the fiery writing on the wall, and wondered if some fresh tragedy were imminent.

When I again turned Agnese had gone, and Delilah's eyes had narrowed to a look of feline cunning. I was conscious that the passing instants were swift and sinister. I could read, without the Penumbra, that in the back of her brain lay a resolve like a coiled serpent about to strike. I divined the substance of her telegram as though its brief phrase had been before me. Obviously it was a caution from Riva and Scarafaggio that I had taken such measures as precluded their attack. They naturally attributed to me the Camorra's order to halt. Moreover, they returned the shapeless fabric of our Penumbra, whose wreck had doubtless been found by the gardener near the place where I had been seen standing, and which had been given them for examination. They had naturally stamped it with the character of an infernal machine such as intimates of Satan would employ.

The colour had faded from her sun browned face, and in a voice of deadly quietness she said, "I, who am alone in a world of wrongdoers, wish to question you as to the experiment you and Vaini have applied to the murder of my husband, and of which I was the object yesterday."

"It holds a splendid secret," I observed with genial good humour; "the Professor calls it the Terror of the Unknown."

"It becomes you to talk of secrets," she cried, choking with anger, "you who have sought to pry into a secret that involved fame and reputation. Men have been stabbed to death for less."

"You speak now of your dead husband," I interrupted, catching her malice.

"I speak less of him than of your friend Vaini, whom I have ordered out of Naples."

I watched her with rising admiration. With her classic face and athletic poise and gladiator's courage, she seemed in her danger one of those about to die, who to this day salute Cæsar in the arena of life.

"Every hour for a fortnight past," she continued, "as I tasted the dregs of a misery men drink from and go mad, I have asked myself are you for or against

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"In a Venetian mirror I beheld the reflection of Baserio's wife, and saw her rest a foot upon a chair, lift the black skirt, and take something from her garter

me? You who came as a friend," she cried, smiting the shattered Penumbra, "brought *this* that was to deliver me into the snare of the fowler. Every time that I move to save myself an outstretched hand that is yours motions me back. It was this devilish thing that, as Vaini plied me with wicked questions, took my vitality and numbed my thoughts — this that bewitched Agnese and flung Beato to the ground."

"In Vaini's orange-grove, at the head of a long straight walk, stands the marble statue of Apollo which I bought at the sale of Cinquedea's collection."

There was a faint sound at the closed door behind me, and, knowing Italian ways, I instinctively wheeled, half-drawing a revolver. Was it merely Agnese eavesdropping, or had Riva and Scarafaggio stolen a march upon the Camorra?

In a Venetian mirror I beheld the reflection of Saverio's wife, and saw her rest a foot upon a chair, lift the black skirt, and take something from her garter. Then, with right hand uplifted, she sprang noiselessly upon me, and, turning, I caught her wrist and bent it so violently back that the fingers relaxed and a shining blade fell to the floor.

In that instant I awoke from my hallucination, stabbed to the heart by the stiletto which had not touched me.

A silence followed wherein many things crumbled away. A yellow light shone in Delilah's lynx eyes, her lips quivering as though she breathed a curse. And the odd fancy came to me that if indeed the souls of those who have deeply loved or passionately hated seek one another at the last, her spirit would strive, as the final act of Earth, to lay a malediction upon mine.

Vaini's cloister garden grows more poetically beautiful each year. Its *Toujours ou Jamais* roses, flowering in December, have covered its walls with rutous bloom. The antique marbles wherewith the master adorned its inglenooks have become garlanded with violets.

Across the translucence of Italian atmosphere, a ruby amber veil is laid at every Ottobrata upon the hill-sides, tingeing them with the red gold of Imperial Rome that fades, as shadows lengthen, to the mediæval calm of silver twilight. And beyond the sky-swung tracery of olive branches, beyond the sunset's face of flame, beyond last year's bird-call, I remember the sinister task Vaini set me, and listen to its whisper of subtle and significant things.

To this day it is not officially known who killed Saverio, the trial having been abandoned "for want of evidence."

Doubtless the truth was traced upon the Penumbra at the moment when its mechanism—strained beyond inherent limitations and smitten by some force of Nature which resents the puny investigation of man—flew into atoms. The Professor occasionally alluded to this failure as the supreme disappointment of his life, and solemnly declared that, in hands less maladroit than mine, the possible would have been overstepped.

Here, in this Villa Sirena, which in life was his delight, are preserved those contrivances and time-stained volumes of curious lore which were his implements—symbols of life's untiring and fruitless quest for light and happiness and peace.

In Vaini's orange-grove, at the head of a long straight walk, stands the marble statue of Apollo which I bought at the sale of Cinquedea's collection and gave the Professor in memento of our experiment. Ages have mellowed it to a rich old ivory. The sun-god stands lightly poised, nude, an athlete fresh from the bath, statuesquely meditative, keeping the secret of the Cinquedea crime, and still bearing at the knee a faint dark stain where one who came red-handed from the murder groped softly by in the dark. The figure holds a seven-stringed lyre, touching a string in symphony with each elegiac phrase. For the sun-god is speaking with the thrilling cadence of the Spartan flutes as one that delivers some heroic utterance, intent, self-centred, masterful, not distraught with a thousand things. It is less the figure of a god than a type of the antique mind. It possesses the gift of divine youth, and is telling of the singers of songs that still live, of the makers of things that endure—deathless and superb—to this day. Behind the eloquent silence of his phrase ring the notes the Greeks employed to accent the spoken word—from the high contralto of transcendent joy and triumph to the deeps of suffering and death. Whoever listens, hears an accent of that intense concentration which throughout the classic life reflected itself in every achievement, making the examples bequeathed to us immortal. About this image still gleams the light that shone upon the spears of Marathon. Is it too much to say that the human heart of all ages is the lyre whose strings the sun-god thrills? And standing thus in the sunshine, in the delight of the sapphire blue, in the midst of the laurel he loved, and filling the air with his song-craft, that figure reminds me how widespread and lasting has been the worship of the sun, call we the sun-god Zeus, or Baal, or Moloch, or Apollo, or Amon Ra, from Cleopatra presenting the new-born Cesarion to Osiris, to the Blackfoot squaw that lifts her infant to the benediction of the rising sun.

When, in this land of summer, the summer dies, I walk in Vaini's garden and pause to look upon that silent yet eloquent statue and to remember Delilah.

I think of her as she appeared that sunny afternoon in her garden, kneeling with beautiful face uplifted and transfigured. And before me, as I write, is the little silver goblet she gave me that day, bearing its fateful sarcasm, *Amicizia è Fedelità*

One evening, five years after the Cinquedea crime, walking thus amid the orange-trees, I became suddenly conscious of a haunting, fleeting, twilight presence, and, turning to one beside me, cried, "Delilah is dead!" A week later

I went to Naples, and called upon the curato who had spiritually attended her at the last.

It is a Neapolitan superstition that dying people see things. Even the elect are not wholly alone, and many a saint has beheld Satan peeping at the window. "In the sunshine there lurks a shadow—athwart the shuttered casement there steals a gleam of light. It is thus, Signore," murmured the little old priest, "we know that something waits and beckons."

"Was Scarafaggio brother, foster-brother, or lover?" I asked.

"Cosa vuole, what would you? Upon the Sacrosanto I know not nor yet the manner of Saverio's death."

"Its manner," I said, "was plain as the crust in your soup. Delilah incited Riva and Scarafaggio, stationed them in the room, and when the attack commenced, crept back and looked on. And to think that between those two men there was such jealous hate that each would rather have spared Saverio and stabbed the other!"

"You seem to have known them well," observed the little Padre, lifting his faded eyes to mine with a smile. "Perhaps you knew Delilah very well also?"

"She cut the acquaintance short," I answered drily—"as women sometimes do."

"From me she would hear nothing," observed the gentle curato after a pause—"nothing—being half a pagan; yet, when the burden of earth fell away . . . perhaps her soul flew fair!"

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

The cloister garden.

Univ. of
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BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

I.

EARLY in 1897 the ecclesiastical authorities of Amalfi removed the painted stucco wherewith the eighteenth-century *baroque* taste had covered some fine columns in their Cathedral nave. Those columns were part of the débris of ancient Pæstum transported there in the eleventh century by Robert Guiscard, and with them was brought much building material—cornices, lintels, pediments, and tombstones to be used in the decoration of the new city. A general removal of stucco bared several such fragments in the Cathedral walls, and in the hope of finding something noteworthy among these uncovered stones, I went to Amalfi at the beginning of October. Nothing rewarded my search beyond a few half-legible words, until the sacristan brought me a marble tablet that had fallen from a pilaster. It was the front of a cinerary box, an inch thick and a foot square. In its angles I observed the emblem of sun or fire worship. It bore a mutilated inscription, of which I took a rubbing; and after an hour's study, made the following translation of its fifth-century Latin:

卐 Aristodicides of Syracuse (the son of) Mele(ager) Beloved of the Ilian Ath(ena) Who in the (year of the) desolation of Gen(seric) Removed the sacred flame of Poseidon (to the) Crypt called the thinking (place of) Po(seidon) 卐

The year of the "desolation of Genseric" was A.D. 455. What the sacred flame had been, or whether the crypt to which it had been removed still existed, aroused my deepest interest.

I at once resolved to pass a few days at Pæstum, with whose temples I was familiar, and where in recent years I had twice spent a night at the Villa Salati with Danilo Macagni, their official custodian. The thought grew strong that Aristodicides had been an inhabitant of Pæstum, and that when Pagan Rome crumbled, he had withdrawn a votive lamp from the shrine of Poseidon to some

hiding-place of safety. Such votive flames were frequent in ancient Greece and Rome, the fire kept alight by Vestal Virgins being an example. Such a flame could not well have been carried very far, and would probably be hidden in some adjacent sanctuary unknown to early Christians. Might not this thinking place have been a subterranean cell connected with the Temple—perhaps to this day as perfect as the chambers discovered in the Pyramids?

In the eleventh century the demolition was so thorough that ancient Pæstum passed piecemeal by sea to Amalfi, only the blocks whereof the temples are built being too heavy to move. It was thus the mortuary tablet of Aristodicides found its way to the sunny town of Cathedral steps. Where once were streets and walls is now waste land, and the House of Poseidon stands in a plain of spectral silence. Behind it rise lean rock-shadowed hills, and westward the sea is a-glitter—the same sea that chafed and surged and babbled on these rocks of old. The twice-blooming roses of Pæstum mentioned by Ovid and Virgil survive, still breathing the perfume wherewith Poseidon blessed them. This temple is the finest surviving specimen of classic architecture, and is born from the immortal heart of Greece. An instinct of artistic creation animates its colonnades, wherein we read the thought of men who achieved their ideal. To-day the lizard glides furtively across its pavement in the noonday's glamour. Amid this sun-browned calm the voice of soft-spoken Italy bids us take note how beautifully the gods set the stage for the mortals they loved; and a shaggy mongrel—a democratic mix of dog dregs—limps by, baring his yellow fangs, and recalling *to-day*.

At the centre of Pæstum's ruined walls stands a large farmhouse—a house of "many mansions," to quote St. John—that with its score of rooms might lodge a dozen. It shelters occasional visitors who linger more than a day, and artists. Against its ancient stucco and wine-coloured timbers, the tamarisks lift their riotous bloom. On that day the dim poetry of autumnal pathos touched its garden with mauve and green and amber tints. At the door hung a grey parrot addicted to conversation. Above a dilapidated pergola, the sunlight, striking through reddening vines, transformed their leaves to a supernatural brilliance—as though some curious whims of fancy had been made real and sky-swung in opalescent light.

Danilo Macagni, curator of the ruins, with whom I had often spoken during previous visits, received me with that charming courtesy for which only Italians have leisure.

"Come with me upstairs, Signore . . . guest of my house, you shall have the best room. . . . It is not much: *cosa vuole*, what would you more than our best? Dinner will be ready at once . . . *subito, subito*!" he added, his white teeth gleaming. "You are always punctual, and that is right . . . we should eat when the farina is ready . . . the thread at the needle's eye. You like our spaghetti? You are a man of taste—it is best as Diana orders it, unspoiled by sauce."

"*Parlate d'oro*," screamed the parrot as its master shuffled away.

I had seen Diana Macagni twice when I had supped and spent the night under her father's roof. But the important purpose which took me to the Villa Salati in 1897, and the tragic circumstances which resulted, have identified my remembrance of her with that October meeting. On the first occasion I had spoken to her only in the garden, once finding her busy with pruning-knife, lifting the bared arms of Helen to an espaliered vine, and again in the arbour, when pouring for me a draught of Falerno, I said, half jesting, "I tremble, Signorina, lest you lead me across the Bridge of Sighs."

Now I found her in the upper hall, near a wide fireless chimney, seated upon a tabouret before an embroidery frame, across which her fingers were weaving some web remote as fairyland. I wondered whether in these graceless days we shall ever again know the charm of hand-made things. And when she turned and bade me a smiling good-day, I thought of her namesake—that white-bosomed Diana whom the Ephesians loved.

My frugal dinner ended, I went to the Temple of Poseidon, where for the first time I was to dig in Vaini's phantom domain without his guidance. I knew the ruin well, but scanned it now with an interest wholly new. I traversed the central enclosure, examining the fallen fragments and the sides of its parallelogram. For centuries nothing has changed in the aspect of its colonnades, nor have the masters of Italian archæology found about its site any clue to hidden things. I observed in the fields a black-coated man busy with a surveyor's instrument. In the distance lay the brooding beauty of Italy, and seaward, a veiled metallic shimmer, like the steely blue of a Toledo blade, rested on the water. The eager October wind was strewing the Court of Poseidon with yellowing leaves, and bore a sense of harpstrings faintly smitten before forgotten gods.

I had brought with me an instrument at whose mention the reader will smile, its power being almost unknown. It is before me now—a crystal sphere the size of a tennis-ball, within whose glowing heart I doubted not I should presently evoke, amid faint colour and fretted outline, a semblance of Aristodicides, the beloved of Athena. I raised it in the sunlight—the work of a lifetime in the making—and older perhaps than the ruin wherein I stood. What weird thoughts must have been woven about that small circle . . . how lurid a semblance of life's chaotic drama have moved within it—signalling, beckoning, and fading away!

Standing that noonday where once had been the Altar, and concentrating my attention upon the crystal, I heard a light footfall, and turning beheld Diana Macagni, alert as her namesake, the huntress of classic days, and like her startled at sight of an intruder. For this modern Diana instantly connected the uplifted crystal with an uncanny purpose, and her grey eyes turned pale yellow with excitement—like brilliant catseyes in the sunshine. The thought flashed upon me that what I was in search of might be no secret to this keen girl who had been so quick to follow and observe. A colour of pink roses fell all about her, and where she moved there trembled a thought of music. I looked deep in the grey of her eyes and remembered the silver sea Poseidon loved. The fine white brow under the coiled hair was troubled, and the smile with which she greeted me faded instantly.

"Signorina," I said, "it is fortunate that you have come to direct me, for I am not a little puzzled. I have reason to believe that beneath this ruin is a chamber wherein is hidden a curious vestige of antiquity."

The anemone flush faded, and the girl's lips whitened with anger. "Signore," she replied impetuously, "there are things to be spoken only when one is about to die."

"That will be late for you and not soon enough for me," I answered. "This crystal, which contains the elements of pure intellectual force, may presently reveal more than either of us know. Come, stand beside me—you shall see faces, and this temple as it was, and ancient Posidonia, a fairy city thick-painted with vivid sunshine and deep shade."

The girl listened in tragic silence, then suddenly, to my amusement, exclaimed, "There is but one proper thing for you to do, Signore, and that is to go away."

"You put the truth exquisitely," I assented; "but what if my heart bid me stay?"

"You forestieri," cried Diana, in a torrent of displeasure, "are enough to drive one mad. You patronise us, laugh at us, write stories about us, burrow under our temples, uncover our graves, and strip our country of the things we love. It is true that we are poor—but have we no feelings?"

"Very well said," interposed the grave, quiet voice I knew so well, as into the temple stepped the black-coated man I had noticed surveying, and in whom, at that distance, I had not recognised Professor Vaini.

He was evidently surprised, and not altogether pleased at finding me in possession, and stood glancing alternately at me and at Signorina Macagni. He looked, as ever, a type of the fine-handed artist, deliberate, admitting no failure, self-centred, and masterful as one who has tourneyed with forces we call unknown "Whilst I am deep in toil," he at length said, eyeing me severely, "living laborious days, I find you, my junior associate, foot-loose as usual, and provoking this young woman to anger."

"This young woman," I answered, "is well able to take care of herself. As to my being here foot-loose, I have come on a quest that perhaps brings you also. For years I have conjectured the presence of some buried mystery, and an instinct, strong as the whisper of scientific intuition, pointed the way. This young lady is present as my assistant, and was about to put me on the line of discovery when you appeared."

"So much the better," exclaimed my former tutor, addressing Diana Macagni with a quizzical smile. "Doubtless, Signorina, you and your father know that a subterranean passage leads from the Villa Salati to a point beneath us. This implement," he added, showing us a small gold blade, "which I call my underground master-key, has revealed its course with precision, and you will now guide me to its entrance. There is no joy, philosophers say, in mere possession, and you are too sensible to oblige me to invoke the authorities. Our purpose is to recover whatever lies buried here and place it beyond peradventure. As you were saying when I arrived, a freak collector—a mercenary dealer—a meddling savant—who can estimate the desecration of these modern days?"

Diana listened aghast before this menace. Yet, glancing at her dauntless face, the odd fancy came to me that beyond Vaini's spoken word some inspiration, unheard by our grosser sense, had reached her, and while filling her soul with a purpose, had laid the finger of silence on her lips.

At this moment a nasal drawl sounded outside the Temple. "That unchewn grass," remarked a man's voice, "is not worth a hundred dollars."

I beheld a middle-aged man and a young woman—evidently tourists from Chicago. "Say, Poppa," asked the girl, "what place did you tell me this is?"

"In I-talian," replied her father, spelling the name from a guide-book, "it's PESTO. . . . Look out, Hefty, you've catched your dress."

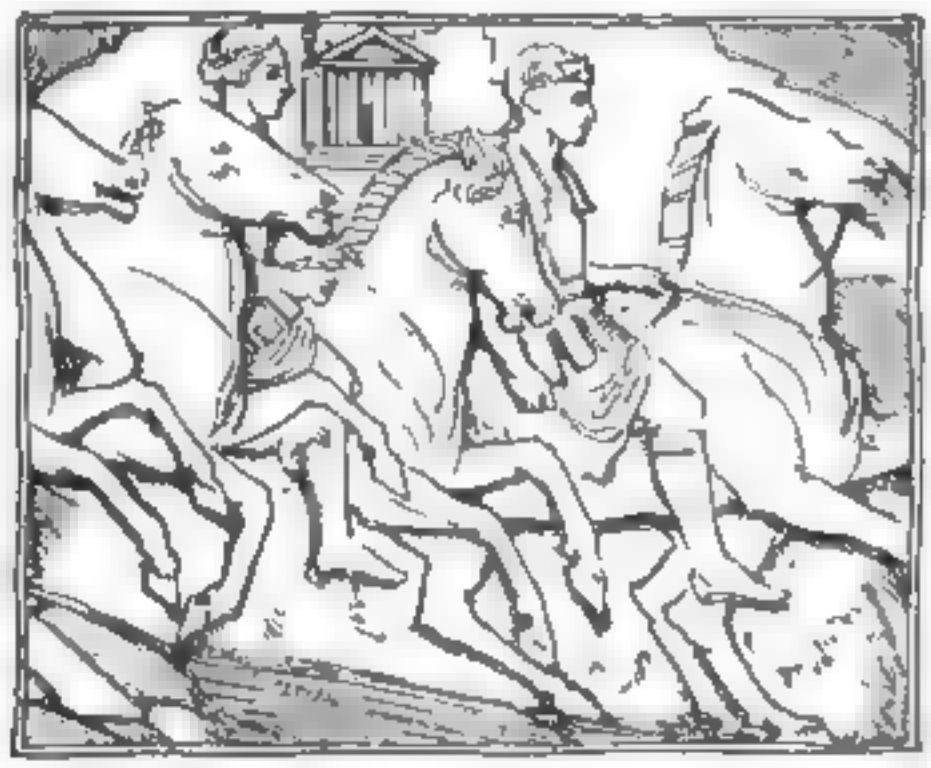
"Poppa," replied the girl severely, clearing her skirt, don't say *catched*—say *cort*."

"I guess we'll stop here overnight," said her father to Danilo Macagni, who followed. "Our baggage has gone somewhere down the line, and we'll wait till we find it—and I *will* find it, I bet you a dollar *and* a quarter. You can fix us up a lunch, just a four-egg omelette—no fresh-water chickens, as we call your frogs.—What did you say is your name—Devil Macaroni?"

"I don't want but a cracker heavily stuccoed with jam," interposed the daughter.

Her father turned to me with a thoughtful smile "I've written to my friend

the Bishop of Nebraska to come out and work up a gospel point about this country. Naples! Why, it smells like to kill flies. Ruins, beggars, hotel sharks—and, Great day in the morning! no more morals than a backyard cat!"



II.

I had seen these people at the hotel at Amalfi and had heard them addressed as Mr. Gallagher and his daughter. The father was a man of distinctively American type, of slender figure, and having a face that bore the stamp of meditative power and the habit of control. His iron-grey hair rose straight from a square forehead, and in moments of abstraction the lines about his mouth seemed to harden to iron. He had begun life as a country lad, had found employment on the nearest railway, and in twenty years had made his way into the phalanx of millionaires. He spoke the Western nasal vernacular, and smiled so sourly at his own jokes, that in mirthful sallies his lips reminded me of a nutcracker.

His daughter was habited in a Parisian silk gown, and wore a little felt wide-awake hat perched upon a mass of yellow coils. Her features reflected her father's earnest self-dependence. She had fine teeth, red lips, and a beaming facial irradiation. Her voice was shrill, and she spoke in a leisurely drawl. She possessed a considerable stock of mixed information, inclined to an extreme of nervous restlessness, and adored her native belongings. "There are many cities," she said, "but only one Chicago." She habitually adorned her phrases with the split infinitive, was familiar with chance travelling folk, and shook hands with the hotel head waiter. By way of religion, both father and daughter cherished a sentiment of absolute human equality, and their ardour ran towards such mechanisms as submarines, motors, and pianolas. This physical and mental similarity Miss Gallagher expressed by the Americanism that she "favoured her Poppa."

During that afternoon and on the following morning Vaini laboured fruitlessly to induce Danilo Macagni to permit us to enter the passage we no longer doubted led to the crypt referred to on the fragment I had found. Several times he and I walked together in the fields, away from listeners, considering the possibilities of our situation. I have often recalled Vaini as I beheld him in the calm of those brilliant October days, for he too felt the charm of such hours. He spoke with

an insight which illumined the Italian suavity of his phrase, and reflected from within himself those elements which made the antique type.

"More than once," he said, glancing back at the Villa Salati, "I have told you that in this modern Italy there are not wanting a few in every walk of life, often the humblest, who, after all these centuries, still hold the curtains of their past wide open. They boast themselves descended from blood that was patrician when ours . . . ? They study the enchanted fields that we call myths, and Rome for them still wears its crown. As one that wakes to music, they return to Egeria and the Sibylline books. For them, all good things follow where once Diana trod. More than this, they claim a faculty that brings Time back with vividness. Things that with us have faded into remote perspective stand in their foreground. With us history is a makeshift; to these people, several of whom I have known, it is something they remember."

"Is it possible," I interrupted, "that Danilo and his daughter are of that pagan world?"

"It goes without saying," answered the professor, "though how they became possessed of a secret that has descended through perhaps seventy generations is useless to speculate upon. It suffices to know that to these people the thoughts that filled the classic mind are as real as to the orthodox are the pearly gates. Their life is spent in a haunted chamber—a *camera infestata*, as we say—wherein they move through bygone ages, and meet men and women who like themselves lived ages ago. Our line of action is clear. After luncheon you will oblige me by finding the Signorina whilst I talk with her father. We will propose the same offer to both. If they will allow us to enter the crypt and make half an hour's examination we will leave Pæstum, engaging to take with us the two itinerants and their luggage—lost or found."

Lunch, the Italian noonday dinner, was served in the upstairs hall at a long table. Danilo and his daughter did the honours at one end, Mr. and Miss Gallagher being seated at the other, and Vaini and I side by side. It was a repast that could not have pleased the transatlantics, and the lady remarked that she "despised" it. Mr. Gallagher was disposed to conversation, and perforce addressed himself to me, Vaini not understanding English. I listened with amusement, having known many of his type—men whose lives have been spent building a pyramid of dollars, whose minds worked like high-speed machinery, of a generous and insouciant nature, joking with servants, offering cigars to the waiters at his club, addressing bank presidents, barkeepers, and housemaids all by their first name.

To that indescribable broth that goes so well with grated parmiggiano, followed fish from the hill-streams, and slender savoury sausages on a bed of saffron-tinted rizotto. The table was ornamented with wild flowers and with fiaschi of white wine—"the vino d'amore of Petronius," remarked Diana.

"I'm as dry as a mummy," said Mr. Gallagher, with a good-natured laugh: "a horse's neck, with a streak of Blue grass whisky through it, would be just about the drink for yours truly. Say, Devil Macaroni, can't you get some fatted calf fixed up for to-morrow?"

"Poppa," interposed his daughter, with a furtive glance toward Diana, "I just hate that girl. Say, let's put our rain-coats and some sandwiches in a grip-sack and start for home!"

Her father gave no heed. "We are ourselves descended from a Roman family," he observed; "*antic* blood is a choice thing, and ours is antic as old Manongahela. Our first ancestor was an elegant gentleman named Caligula—pronounced Gallagher out in the States."

"Professor Vaini," I answered, translating, "is deeply interested."

"My uncle," resumed Mr. Gallagher, reverting to family associations, "was a captain of in-dustery. He was the Cracker-king of Ohio, and the luckiest man in the State. He took out a half-million-dollar accident policy, and was killed in a smash next month. He liked old things too—went to see the Sphinx and Pyramids in our Chicago cyclorama, and it gave him buck fever—it did so."

"I am delighted," I replied, "to find that you have the tastes of an antiquary."

"If that cat looks at me again," muttered Miss Hefty, "seems like I'd have to jerk her endwise."

"When I told the Bishop of Nebraska," continued Mr. Gallagher, "I was going to Rome to overhaul the antics, he says: 'They were a cruel race, always killing. Look at Julius Cæsar—killed everybody—even Brutus, the only friend he ever had. "You too, Brutus," he said, as he drew his knife.' But I says to him, 'Bish! wasn't killing the job he was hired for, and do you suppose any man named Julius Cæsar wouldn't act white!' You don't know the Bishop, eh? If ever you hear him preach I bet a dollar *and* a quarter you'll say he's the champion uplifter."

That evening, leaning at my open casement, the slow wind seemed heavy with undertones whereof the Day asks no question. A capricious breeze fluttered the tree-tops, and about me all was shadowy and sweet. In the silver marvel of moonlight the temple stood clean-cut and luminous. How beautiful seemed the repose of that ancient world whereof it is an eloquent fragment! Afar a nightingale whispered its long-drawn passion. Oh, troubadour of the night, what inspiration was there in your wooing! That thrilling bird song was measuring the deeps of memory and love—the love whose eyes, ages ago, beheld these same stars shining. Was it not in such hours the Greek girls went to dance with their gods, their white bodies flitting through the darkness till, at the approach of day, they vanished, leaving the phantasy of dryads changed to pale fir and tremulous aspen?

Closing the window, I seated myself before the fire and thought of Diana Macagni. Two days had passed, and whenever I met her, whether in the old hall or on the broad staircase or in the garden, I perceived new grace. I found myself growing absorbed in this meditative, grey-eyed girl—her words, her moods,—and the charm of her presence had suddenly become the corner-stone of my thought. At each chance meeting the animation of her eyes seemed deeper, her smile more tender, as one whose soul is musing. So many things she said that sounded familiar, so many traits I seemed to recognise!

Next morning I found Diana Macagni in the leafy silence of her garden. How handsome she looked, simply habited in a gown of peacock blue, lifting to the tendrils hands so fine and deft I remember thinking that what they did could never be wholly undone. About her was the aura that surrounds every beautiful girl who walks in the rapture of youth. I read in her face that she lived beneath lofty skies—in her voice were love and a song.

"Signorina," I said, "in those pagan days whose memory delights us both, you would have been taken for some flower a god had breathed upon."

"Yonder, at least, is the house of the god," she answered, with a mischievous laugh, pointing to the temple. "Who shall say," she added with finesse, "that among yonder columns rustles no phantom breathing over and over the sospiro d'amore of some sweet-songed love!"

"You do not like our modern times," I observed, "when Caliban is master and Cerberus sits at the feast."

"And do you never long," she asked, turning upon me an intent look from beneath that fine straight brow, "to taste those brilliant days again . . . to leave this staleness and go back to the wonder-world?"

"What is this waking nightmare," I ejaculated, "this walking and talking with things for ever vanished? To me the thought of your twilight is like stepping from terra-firma into space."

"Do you never," queried the girl after a moment's thought, "hear something calling you away? Have you never listened at dawn to the voices of fishermen—so far and faint that they come only as a murmur? Out of a greater darkness and from an infinity of time comes the whisper we all hear and few understand."

"Yours is a mind of ideals on fire," I exclaimed. "Were they a trifle more pronounced, we should call them madness. As it is, they are but fugitive fancies none take seriously. Let us come nearer the things of to-day. My companion and I have discovered the existence of a chamber under Poseidon's Temple, and we feel sure you are familiar with a secret passage leading to it. We wish to stand for a few moments within that sanctuary. If you will lead us there, you shall have the only reward you would care for. Professor Vaini and I will leave Pæstum without delay, taking with us those Gallaghers I am sure you regard with little favour."

The girl cast disdainfully aside the flowers she had gathered, and facing me with blazing eyes and hot blood mantling, was about to launch a refusal as tremendous as the stroke wherewith her classic namesake smote an intruder.

My attention was diverted from this menace by the appearance of Professor Vaini, who, emerging from the villa, beckoned with that peculiar wave of the hand which to the chosen few meant *urgentissimo*. Then, with a stiff little familiar gesture, he buttoned his frock-coat as a duellist who makes ready. Behind him stood Danilo Macagni, with intent dog-like gaze fixed upon me, and I divined that the custode had yielded to the suggestion I had presented to his daughter without effect. I was quick to suspect that the Maestro, conjecturing Macagni's affiliation to the Chosen Few, had whispered one of those tone-words of occult cabala which in classic days swayed the wisest, and in the nineteenth century survived to influence their less-learned inheritors.

As I joined him he muttered—"Let us to the crypt," and at the words the custode motioned us downstairs into a broad cellar. Unlocking a door, he gave us each a lantern, and we entered an arched brick passage, so crumbling that in places it seemed ready to fall. My pocket compass showed that we were heading for the temple. We presently found ourselves in a granite chamber twenty feet long, in the centre of which was a marble altar whereon rested a meteoric stone. Beside it lay an onyx tablet covered with an engraved Greek inscription, of which I instantly took a rubbing. Between the two burned a flame in a bronze Etruscan lamp, whose ever replenished wick and oil kept alive the "sacred flame" in this "thinking-place" of Poseidon. In the wall was the indication of a staircase long since closed. The plaster with which this filling-in had been covered bore a Greek graffito roughly scratched while it was still wet:

"THE USELESSNESS AND FUTILITY OF EVERYTHING."

How ominous sounded these words, transmitted across fourteen centuries, the message of the old world to the new!

Our discovery was so tremendous that Vaini and I were overwhelmed by it and thrown off our guard. We both forgot the open door where the passage led from the Salati cellar.

There was a quick footfall, and Mr. and Miss Gallagher stood in our midst. "I guess, sir," he remarked to me with a genial smile, "that this is the surprise of your life. I was watching you out of the tail of my eye, and when you disappeared down cellar, I says to Hefty, 'You may bet a dollar *and* a quarter he's put on his forty horse-power. The Professor's right down to business, and there'll be no cloves on his breath to-day.' I call this a cu-rio-sity. Makes me feel like I must learn to eye-search these old places."

As he spoke, his daughter stepped forward, and saying, "Idolatry is a thing I *do* despise," blew out the sacred flame. And at the instant that frail spark expired, I heard in the air a strange little sound like the snap of a breaking wire.

"*Sportaccione!*" whispered Vaini, his eyes red with passion.

"I guess I'm the top bubble now," cried Miss Gallagher, with a shrill laugh.

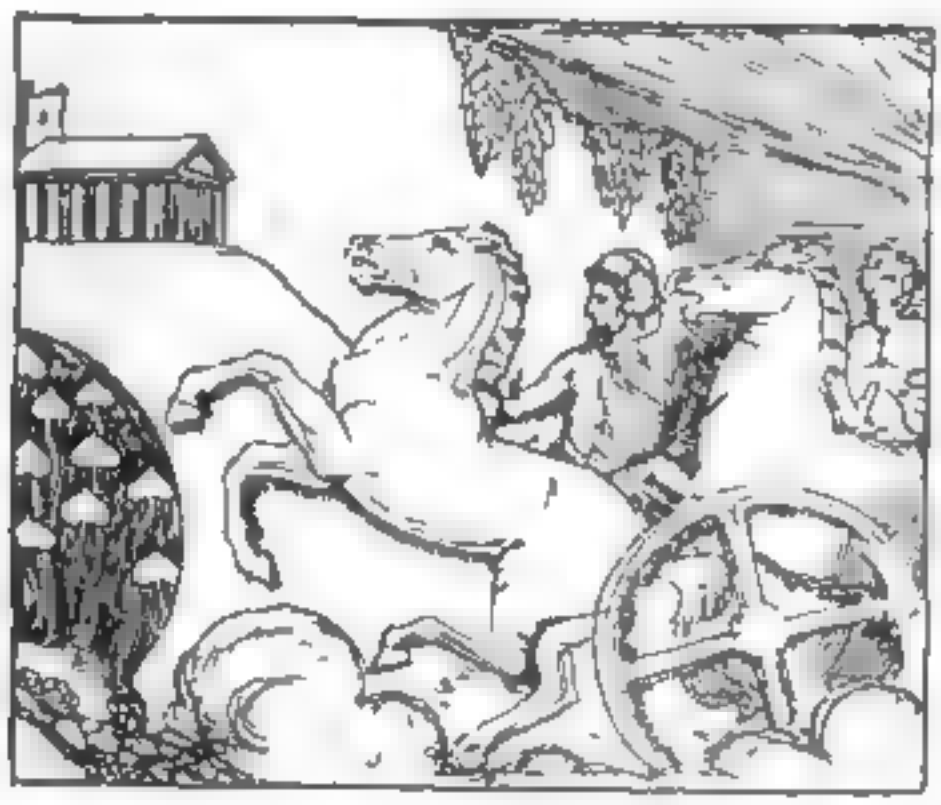
A moment of deathly hush followed. We were silenced by an act of such refined savagery.

Miss Gallagher resented, without understanding, Vaini's exclamation. "Tell your friend not to get superheated," she sneered.

"Tell him to come off the grass and talk sense," added her father, who likewise attributed no gracious meaning to the Italian word. "Come, brothers, let us back track into the open."

As moved by some common instinct we hastily returned to the sunshine, where stood Diana, her colour faded, her eyes wet. Could she have anticipated what had happened?

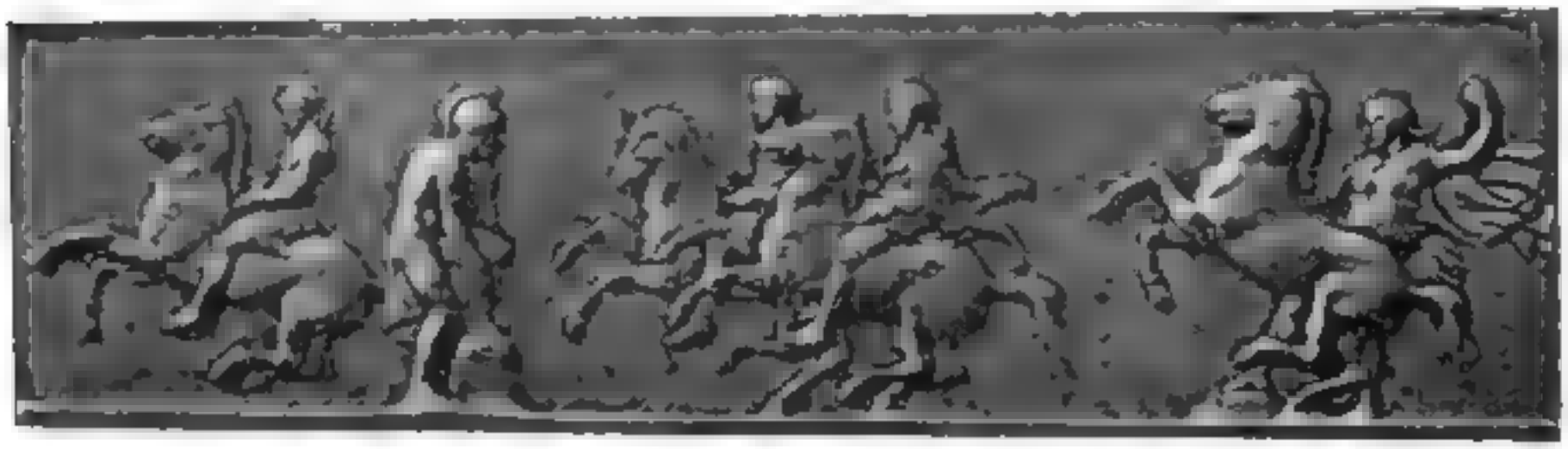
And at sight of us the grey parrot extended its wings and screamed "*È una Porcheria.*"



III.

How often I regret not having brought from the crypt for an hour's inspection the tablet which in that brief glance seemed of onyx graven with an archaic Greek inscription of four stanzas. It still rests on that altar of sculptured sirens and sea-plants whereon Poseidon's flame no longer burns. The authorities have caused

the entire passage to be filled, and who can say how many centuries may pass before human eyes again behold that labourer's scrawl?



"THE FUTILITY AND USELESSNESS OF EVERYTHING."

The translation of the rubbing I had made presented no difficulty to my former tutor. In his opinion the onyx scarab had been executed at Syracuse, since it shows the emblems of that city as borne on its tetradrachms of B.C. 270. When Baal-Kareth sailed, Stonehenge had been standing eighteen hundred years. The "deathless sun" perhaps refers to the midnight sun. The "undiscovered sea" may have been the Mare Germanicus of the Romans. The phenomenon of the cloud is frequently seen in Norway in midsummer, and it is probable that the voyagers spent an early spring navigating Norwegian fiords. Here I have rendered Vaini's Italian into English.

I, Baal-Kareth, priest of the Sun-god,
Sailed to the north in search of the deathless sun.
With me were Imlico the navigator,
Hiero the Phenician, Timoleon son of Lysimachus,
And Gisco the singer. Mariners also were there
Knowing the meaning of wind when it whispers,
And diviners to interpret stillness when there is no sound.

We, readers of the Book of the Dead,
Sought to behold the eye of the timeless god.
Our ship cut the waves like a thing of life,
Our canvas was a sun-browned pyramid.
The oars rose and fell through spacious hours,
The undiscovered sea we sailed was a turbulent waste.
There were rocks like a mouthful of ravenous fangs,
Strange birds soared between sea and sky.
A year passed, and one by one we crushed the long days.

We saw the shadows rise and wander on the mountains,
We beheld the snows on the white roof of the world,
And a cloud held the light of the setting sun
Till the light of sunrise kindled upon it.
The harper sang "Such is the fair of face, rising in gold,
Day dawns, night recedes, a new soul is born."

In remembrance whereof and in homage to Poseidon,
Who cherished our strength and heightened our skill,
This flame is lighted to continue deathless and unextinguished,
A spark of the Sun-god, imperishable as the wind on the sea.
May peace be the Sun-god's portion and Poseidon's
So long as the wine of eternal youth flows in their veins—
So long as this flame burns through uncounted ages.

That evening when we gathered at supper I shared the indignant mood of the Italians. If the Gallaghers were conscious of having chilled their welcome, they did not betray it, the daughter dividing her attention between a dish of spaghetti and a Chicago newspaper, while her father, after renewed complaints at the loss of his luggage, engaged me in conversation.

"It's hunger gives a man his razor-edge," he remarked, helping himself to that delicious minestra only Italian cooks can prepare, "and while the food in this country is curious, it is not so curious as the people themselves. Did you ever notice an I-talian crowd. Most remarkable live-stock since Noah's collection. Not got business sense enough to lead a donkey to water. Slow in all things but one. A lady friend who lives in Rome said her landlady had three sets of twins in four years, and the doctor laughed when my friend said, 'Doc, you will have to fix a speed limit.' Coming down in the train I rather surprised a priest explaining my fertiliser. Said I, 'It will make the flower-pattern on your carpet grow a foot high—scent, dewdrops, and all so natural the bees will fly in for honey.' I wasn't all joking, however," he added, handing me a tiny bottle. "Here's a vial you may have for experiments—it will burn a hole in cast iron, and make an alligator turn pink.

"'There's my friend the Bishop of Nebraska, he's different—just loves a joke. We met five years ago on the Denver Railway, and I was surprised at his addressing me by name. 'I wonder how you know me,' I says.

"'Well, sir,' he answered, 'I saw by the papers you were expected, and notice that you have just had an Omaha hair-cut, that you are smoking the cheroots sold at Council Bluffs, and that your umbrella still bears a stain of red Chicago mud.'

"'Do you mean to say,' I exclaimed, 'that's all the evidence you had?'

"'Well, no,' says Bish. 'Fact is, I saw your name on the gripsack you gave to a porter.'"

In the garden Miss Gallagher advanced to meet me, whistling *I'm afraid to go home in the dark.*

I remember pausing to observe the soulless mechanism she had caught from her father and reflected in herself.

"I guess I riled these folks some yesterday," she began, "and perhaps what I did was not white. What I saw of these I-talians out in Illinois learned me they are like their own heathen gods. They hate as long as they remember, and they *never* forget. At home I like to have the housemaids come and sit in my bedroom and do their sewing, but these people ain't human. Poppa wants to have me marry a nobleman, but I says I'm enough sight better off the way I am. I don't want any bought or hired husband. I guess our luggage is bound to turn up to-morrow—I telegraphed a gentleman friend in Naples to give the American Consul rough on rats if it's not found. Before we leave I want to square Devil Macaroni and his daughter. You see, I have a forgiving nature, as a hard-shell Baptist should, and if a thousand francs——"

"Miss Gallagher," I interrupted, "this is not a case for money."

"Well, don't you get snappy," replied the lady. "You remind me of a man I met in a street-car a couple of years ago. I handed him our best tract, *Abide with Me*, but he looked at it stiff, same as you, and gave it back. 'Thank you,' he says, 'I'm a married man.' 'Well,' I says, 'polite manners are getting scarce as hen's teeth.'"

I had begged Signorina Macagni to meet me by the sea, whither I now walked

with Vaini's interpretation of Baal-Kareth's scarab in my hand, reading, as I went, his quaint picture of days when galleys, creaming at their bows, came and went—storm-tossed, weather-bound, coasting these shores.

Presently I beheld her, and, approaching, said, "This inscription cannot be new to you: pray come and explain it."

We seated ourselves on the edge of a crumbling wall by the sea, and taking my words very seriously, she glanced at Vaini's translation and said, "Can you write down in black and white a whisper of the gods? Such things are made to dream of and love, not to be cheapened by overmuch talk! Rather listen than speak. There is in it a sound like the drowsy oars of Charon, or the muffled beat of a heart that throbbed with your own before your present human semblance was born. 'Strange fancies those,' I hear you say—yet to me no more extraordinary than homing birds."

"Such vague and elusive impressions," I answered, "are common to all—more lasting with some than with others."

"Can you speak thus?" interrupted the girl—"can you have forgotten?"

"What," I asked, startled into gravity, "do you expect me to remember?"

"I might expect you to remember *me*."

"My dear signorina," I murmured, taking her hand caressingly, "you brood upon things that keep the nerves high strung till the cords break and the harp no longer speaks."

At the word my eyes rested upon the ring she wore, an uncut ruby . . . and at the sight came to me words as though I once had spoken them . . . *I give you this drop of my heart's blood!* It seemed as though, across the distance of ages, I had heard a door open and shut.

"Since you remember the ring," cried Diana, "you will not have forgotten a name?"

"We called him the Greek—il Greco," I said, the word springing to my mind. "I verily believe it was none other than Poseidon!"

"Yonder," assented the girl, "in the street whose pavement still passes the temple, I stood. It was the festival of the sun-god—the day when each year the town made sacrifice of a maiden. The choice had fallen upon me, and, amid augurs and musicians and dancers and laughing soldiers, I was urged towards that retreat the merry priests called 'The Meeting of the Lips.' In those days you said you loved me. Had you approached the sanctuary by another way? I saw you speaking with the god—he looked a man like yourself. What followed? I heard Poseidon scream, you caught me by the wrist, and along an alley we fled. A shower of sparks blinded me. I wonder—did we marry and were we happy at the last?"

I had risen to my feet in excitement, and now, as though called into being by these words, a moaning floated from the mountains behind me, seeming the reverberance of some gruesome story. Black clouds had suddenly gathered unnoticed.

"We must instantly return to shelter," I cried, cutting short her wild phrase—"a tornado approaches."

As we hurried on, the gale burst, the rain pouring in our faces and the wind shrieking a frantic warning. I laid my hand upon the door of the Villa Salati, when, to my amazement, it fell away with a crash, and I perceived my hand to be resting upon a marble balustrade in a narrow street whose houses raised their roofs so high that the sun's rays never touched its pavement. There were latticed

windows, and doors adorned with uncouth locks that opened into tiny courts. Fresh painted upon one were the words:

HOSPES PULSANTI TIBI SE MIA JANUA PANDET.
(Guest, to you when you knock, this my portal will open.)

At a cook's shop hung a cauldron whose savoury contents a scullion stirred. Within, amid the rattle of dice, some one was telling a story, the climax whereof was received with tipsy laughter and stamping of feet. Above the door hung a stone fashioned like a purse, with the legend—

"Give me what is under your mantle," cried the starving beggar.
"It is only a stone to throw at a dog," answered the rich man; and as he spoke, the purse changed to a stone.

I moved to a broader street, where an odd mixture of types came and went—Roman, Greek, Phœnician, Etruscan rustics, and a single black man, who glanced at me as though stranger than himself. A tawny woman, a veritable Juno, vendor of sweetened wine from a pigskin slung over her shoulder, came by, nude to the waist, her splendid breasts swaying as she walked. A clamour of beggars shrilled from the steps of the temple, whose appearance was completely transfigured, its surface being covered with white marble-dust stucco, whereon were painted heroic figures. Traced on its polished walls was an epitome of kings, priests, soldiers, and sages. Here was indeed the house of a sea-god, and the light of its Doric beauty a consecration to the divine spirit of adventure and discovery. Hither came the homage of those who beheld upon Poseidon's altar a flame lighting the way toward things that in all ages men have given life to reach.

Behind me I still heard the rattle of dice. It was the publican who had followed, dice-box in hand, and who, prefacing with a careless "Salutem," remarked, "Here comes the duumvir Aulus Veius," as a spare, vigorous man passed, holding a gold-headed cane. "Yonder," he added, "is Speratus of Tarentum, who, when he condescends to dine out, takes his own cook. Those soldiers have marched far—see the drops oozing from their buskins! Hither walks Cynæthos, a Corinthian sculptor, and with him Orchomenus the poet. That lame man is Vanustus the tax-gatherer, wearing in his ears his grandmother's imitation gold loops. He commends himself to Suedius Clemens the magistrate. That pretty woman, beneath whose mantle the sandals glitter, is Alleia Sabina, who last year eloped with Tintirius, trainer of athletes."

I was conscious, as I listened, of having touched the top notch of Vaini's dangerous experiments, and of having strayed into a domain of strange gods. I remembered my former tutor's theory that, as there are threads of the morning's opalescence still lingering in the twilight, so the inhabitants of an extinct world may awaken, after a thousand years, a fugitive resonance of days once lived and for ever after loved.

At my side stood Diana, statuesquely at ease in classic garments and amid surroundings that to her were familiar. Instinctively our hands met, and her touch brought the fanciful thought that within me was rekindled the flame I had seen extinguished a day before on Poseidon's altar.

On came the music—near and nearer—till the air thrilled with exultant melody in honour of Poseidon's annual wedding. Pipes, flutes, forest horns, and the rhythm of many voices touched the hour with joy—a love-song mingled with the sunshine—a score of cymbals beating the clash of Eleusinian mysteries. That fine acclaim swept skyward to the stars and martial glory.

Beneath it pierced a note of human triumph, as though the life of the world trembled in passionate emotion. The men's deep voices caught the strain from girlish lips and swelled it to thunder. I was half conscious of some superb illusion, yet the day was real: I could smell the incense, and see the white dust rise beneath the dancers' feet.

Then Diana raised her wistful face to mine, with a tremulous whisper: "*Save me!*"

It was for her the amorous touch of Poseidon burned and waited, and I remembered the narratives of pagan days—of the jests of merry priests of Osiris and Zeus resounding down the mirthful centuries, of women beguiled with offers of the love of a god. It was easy to imagine the bargain with some opulent votary.

I left Diana with the eyes of the hushed and halted procession upon her, and entered the temple unobserved. From behind a curtain came the sound of laughter, and a sonorous voice said in Greek, "Calventius, the philtre . . . my lips are dry with waiting."

It was my opportunity. Springing to the door of a cubiculum, where amid cushioned lounges and wicker chairs and steel mirrors was a table spread with cakes, fruit, and a flagon, I emptied into the wine Mr. Gallagher's elixir that was warranted to burn a hole in cast iron and make the flowers in a carpet pattern grow.

The next instant the god, in whom I beheld the typical young patrician, came into view, clad in crimson tunic, bare-headed and bare-armed. As he filled and emptied a goblet, an amorous sun-flush glowed beneath his olive skin. His movements were those of an athlete—graceful and quick. I doubted not it was some youthful Roman, lusty, persuasive and rich, personating "Il Greco," the Greek Poseidon.

Then suddenly he beheld me watching him, and at the instant Diana appeared urged on by the priests. The sea god fixed his mute astonished gaze upon me, and within a moment of swallowing the love philtre his eyes became bloodshot, his jaw fell, and he clutched convulsively at something he could no longer see.

I caught Diana by the hand, led her lightly past the priests, and with her fled away toward the nearest city gate. There was an outcry from the people like the roar of animals robbed of food. But high and clear above all imprecation rose the shriek of "Il Greco" as Mr. Gallagher's elixir devoured him.

Before us stood a patrol of crimson tunic-ed soldiers—the laughter-loving—a-glitter with brass and steel, poising their javelins as in our despair we halted. How distinct in those faces was the intellectual cruelty of Rome! At the sight Diana placed herself dauntless and superb between me and the lance-heads.

"Tear her away and smite!" vociferated the priest. "Hath he not slain Poseidon?"

I knew that the moment of death had come—a death to be envied, instantaneous, front to the enemy, with Diana beside me.

A centurion leaped to the soldiers and snatched a spear.

"Only the love-stories told in myths are happy," sobbed Diana. "How tragic is their reality!"

As the javelin flew I gazed deep into those fathomless grey eyes, and bent passionately toward those upturned lips.

And we both whispered—"FOREVER."

There was a violent crash overhead, followed by a shower of broken tiles—then

darkness. The Villa Salati trembled, lightning struck, and its closed door swung open. Before me stood Danilo Macagni, Vaini, and the Gallaghers, flying from the smitten house.

"At which of us was that bolt aimed?" ejaculated the Professor, glancing up at the shattered chimney.

"I guess, sir," drawled Miss Gallagher, addressing me, quite unperturbed, "that long-distance message was meant for your lady friend."

"If your life is not insured," interrupted her father, "let me recommend the Spread Eagle of Chicago."

"The vengeance of Poseidon!" muttered Macagni, baring his head to the storm.

IV.

Mr. Gallagher at first explained my hallucination as the effect of a violent thunderstorm upon an excited nervous system. But yielding to conviction, he twisted his mouth into corkscrew curves at the narrative of my meeting with Poseidon, and examined the empty elixir bottle with a long guffaw.

"It was a close call, sir, but, by ginger blue, you gave him a nut-cracker squeeze," he exclaimed, "and I guess the sea-god must have thought something had dropped on him when he got back to his ranche. When I think of his swallowing that medicine I feel like I'd put the leg of my chair on his foot and ground it good and plenty. It must have been a happy life," he added, reflectively stroking his chin, "to be a tinsel-junk god in Roman days. Same as a Trust-buster now out West—the cream of fighting and love-making, and gather in your cheques as regular as servants' dinner. Your friend Poseidon had all the birth-marks of Olympus, just as a chicken raised in an incubator always tastes of the machine. I bet a dollar *and* a quarter, had Poseidon lived to-day the boys would skin him clean and tattoo the stars and stripes on his bare back."

In the excitement of that memorable noonday the luncheon-dinner was forgotten and the Ave Maria rang at sundown as we seated ourselves before a cold supper. Miss Gallagher had delayed it by asking to change rooms with Diana Macagni, a pane of glass having been broken in the spare bedchamber.

"This adventure of yours will make a sensation in the papers," pursued

Mr. Gallagher, swearing softly to himself as one that breathes a prayer. "Out in Chicago we like a story that's razor-blades in front and barbed wire behind. I had a warm experience myself when I was a cowboy out in Wyoming and saved our cattle by driving them across the front of an advancing prairie fire. I must have looked like a scare-head column in a newspaper. There was no time to figure my chances. Had I tried to drive *from* it, I'd have been roasted quick as a once-over shave."

Supper ended, Miss Gallagher rose to prepare for to-morrow's departure, the stray luggage having been found.

"She's a fine girl," remarked the Trust buster admiringly. "Looks pretty well fixed in parrots," he added, alluding to the plumage in her hat, "and her smile doesn't wash off. I guess it frosted you some when she blew out that light. What's a light for anyway, if you can't blow it out and light it again? That's the way I seem to sense it. Yessir, she's the image of her mother thirty years ago. I was a railway manager in those days, and Colonel Revere, my father-in-law that was to be, kept the finest hotel west of the Mississippi. One evening the young people were eating philopenas. You know that means dividing a double almond, and whichever first says *philopena!* to the other next morning gets a prize. I asked Miss Revere to eat a philopena with me, and as we opened a dish of almonds without finding a double, at last she says—'Bite off the half!' and held the almond between her little white teeth while the crowd laughed fit to crack the paint. I felt skittish before so many, but as I bit I whispered, 'Wilt thou?' And her lips trembled as she answered, 'I wilt.'"

"Now, sir, how was that for neatness and despatch?" and the Trust-buster leaned back and laughed hilariously as the Olympian Jove remembering Leda.

The day had taken on for me a subtle meaning—its homespun shot with gold and spangled. A vine which covered the pergola of Diana's garden reddened in the crimsoning October, and seemed a semblance of the morning's vision. I beheld with amazement the marble basin which was that I had seen in the alcove of ancient Pæstum mirthfully called "The Meeting of the Lips," the water still splashing into it, basin and musical cadence unchanged. Faintly came the resonant humming of Diana's lute, rich and sweet as the lyrics she remembered. If some strange sense been preserved to her—some soliloquy of whispered sounds—as about the Gothic aisle floats and lingers the Cathedral-sung Amen? Amid the melody of those accords sounded the delicate carillon of a clock, as though Elfland chimed in the harmony of Earth.

I found Diana in the familiar hall, sitting with the hushed lute in her hands before a crackling log fire. The sunset, sifting through leafless branches, touched its black panels with amorous fancy that bade me speak

"I cannot take my thoughts from that marvellous Pageant Masque," I said, seating myself near her. "Was that hour only an instant, and did some strange telepathy make the illusion identical for us both?"

"It was an expression of the Sixth Sense," she gravely answered. "Were another octave added to our hearing, one more range of cells developed in our brain, our perceptions slightly more attuned to Nature, we should be strung and keyed to receive the touch of a phantom hand. Our eyes would be opened, and we should eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and be as gods."

"Do you mean," I jestingly asked, "that your heart and mine were beating two thousand years ago, and that this morning I poisoned a Roman ghost with American elixir?"

"Have you never walked again in after years with vanished loves and lovers?" cried the girl, with smiling temptress lips. "Has love never entered to you unbidden, with footsteps of divine surprise? The bandage which is upon your eyes has been lifted from mine, and I know that it is not the Past that is dead, but To-day that is cold."

She had laid aside the lute, and risen to meet me, her face flushed with the light of youth, her brown hair touched with a shimmer of silk. I felt, as never before, that love often leaps into being in the pang of a tragical hour.

"So far from cold," I answered, "we may find to-day unpleasantly warm if we have to reckon with Poseidon's hate. Among us we have blown out his candle, given him a poisonous dose, and stolen the girl he awaited. The teeth of the gods bite deep. Your father declares that in remaining here both you and he are braving an unseen but certain death."

"Ages ago you saved me from Poseidon: will you save me from him again?"

Something in my heart answered *Yes*, and I am sure that Diana heard.

"Here in this Hylas-haunted shade," I exclaimed, "your heart will break! It is for me to place you beyond the Demon's malice. Join me at Vaini's villa in a day or two . . . we shall be married after the longest-known engagement, and I will take you far from this fear of dying, far from this incubus of malignant phantoms, to the gentle heart of Nature."

We had drawn close together, so close that a wisp of silky hair brushed my face, and I breathed the ineffable fragrance of her lips. Could a kiss, I wondered, be blown across the centuries?—and thus musing, a hush fell on us like the magnetic silence that follows when sweet and passionate music ends.

. . . . . .

I hurried next day to Vaini's villa, where this characteristic letter from my former tutor flashed across my preparations:—

Translation.

PESTO, *November* 1897.

FRIEND OF MY SOUL,

What are we but playthings of a reckless fate! Was it a viper, or did I indeed hear in my sleep the laughter of Homeric gods? She whom our harvest knew not sleeps with the rose. You remember that the Signorina Gallagher (cagna d'inferno) insisted upon exchanging rooms, and I shall always believe the shaft intended for the one smote the other. Why might not Poseidon make a bull's-eye on the wrong target?

Carissimo, I noticed all yesterday the tragedy that lay in her eyes. Perhaps better than we, *she knew*. This solitude, with its sense of oblivion, put thoughts in her mind and brought the dead to life. Was this poetic riches, or only dust? Now she lies calm, untroubled, marble-white—a Victory superbly statuesque in death. Povero Macagni! He talks of the sorrows of Mary, of tears and the kissing of feet. I tell him he must look beyond the stars.

Devotissimo,

VAINI.

In the light of the twentieth century, Poseidon's shattered temple attests that man's master-thoughts are deathless. Far from the eddies of our little bustle it marks the intellectual supremacy of Greece. About it birds sing all the day and roses bloom all the year. Its immortal garland thrills with the Old World's delight in colour. Quaint fancies drowse and nestle in its shade. Its solitude is

reverberant with music and laughter and the tread of many feet. And I marvel if the heart of Poseidon still warms to the murmur of the sea-shells he loved?

The mountains keep the secret of their ancient days, as enchanters kept their mysteries and listened to the heart-beat of perennial youth. The rim of the bending sky rests on these shores of lyric fame. A sense of dominion thrills and inspires the air. A falcon—silver gleaming in the sun—circles with bladed wing above the memories of that silent plain. There is a soft clash of great sunflower leaves. And I meditate upon the Nemesis that underlay Greek tragedy, and that to this day shatters our purpose and stabs us to the heart. *Absit omen*, muttered the Cæsars, and mankind still trembles at the shaft sped by a force that is blind and irresistible.

Each year I return to walk in the places whose horizon Diana Macagni knew. I stand an enchanted hour in her garden, and gaze on the sun-washed sea. I pluck the rose of joy—*Toujours*—that blooms and fades, while its fine clustering leaves of grief—*Jamais*—are ever green. And sometimes, in the twilight, I fancy again the wings of that extraordinary vision, and catch an accent of vanished things.

I write this in the soft-shod quiet of Vaini's study, amid its books and tapestries and classic fragments. These walls can never lose the note of brilliance of his phrase. I dip into the box wherein he kept the record of his psychic asterisms whose yellowing pacquets are resonant of marvellous success and failure. Before me are his amber chessmen—a tiny *corps d'élite*—wherein he read a semblance of that intellectual force which achieves results, and bends to the master's will, and solves extraordinary problems. He applied the devotion of a lifetime to the weaving of curious arabesques, and his touch was like this Italian sunshine, tipping with splendid light.

As the song is the joy of the singer, so work lives in the life of the worker. It was thus that, searching for the fulcrum Archimedes imagined, Vaini traversed illimitable paths. The aura of his studies drew to the conclusion that even an hour's meditation upon known things points inevitably toward the unknown. He conceived the subtlest theorem of life to be a reflex of the deathless mystery of the stars, and beyond all our experiments lay a groping after the secret of immortality.

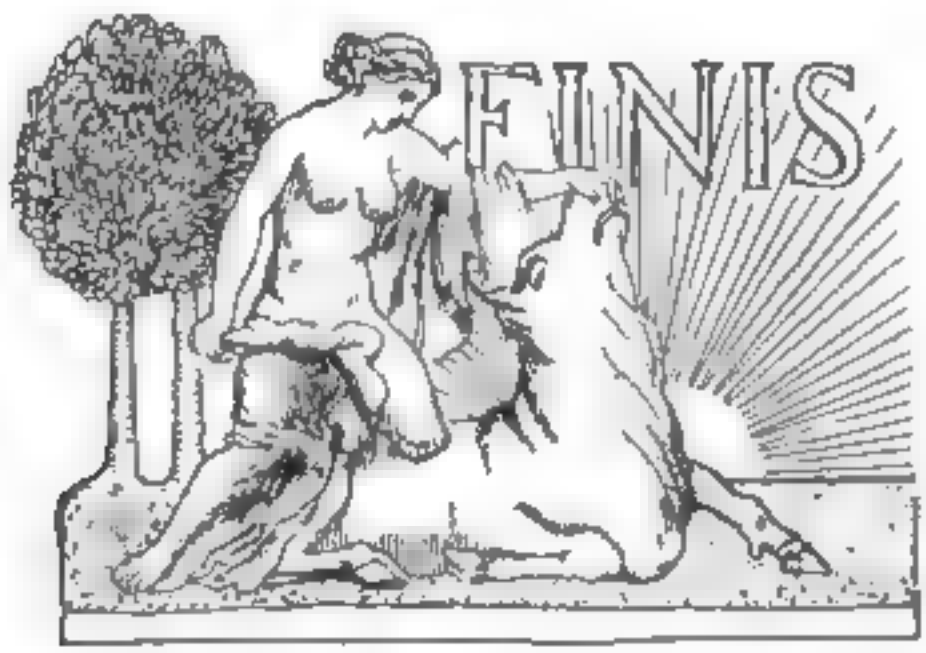
Through midwinter evenings I muse upon those happy days and watch the firelight's tracery that leaps and fades and kindles. About me is the phantom consciousness of an outstretched hand . . . Diana's faint caress, or the lurking menace of "Il Greco"? Amid those vague and visionary happenings we call "real life," many have seemed less real than those brief instants I spent in Roman Pæstum.

In Vaini's garden the *Toujours ou Jamais* roses run riot on the cloister wall, and I know that never again shall I stand within the velvet dark they cover. Up and down the flowering walks I stroll between orange-trees and marbles and faint, far memories. There is about these ingle-nooks a harmony akin to the divine hush of silence. Far down the pergola, beyond silver grass and jewelled leaf, the blackbird sings his ecstasy. Across my sundial the shadow pencil moves, and that Roman stone speaks eloquently of the world Diana loved. A shadow lengthens, a grape-vine bends, a bird-song thrills—and behind them moves a presence. It is like the glimpse of a white statue in the perspective of some dim corridor, whose outstretched arm beckons and allures.

It is Diana, and I know that we are hand in hand for ever. I speculate upon our phantom past and grope to find its least, dear trifle, thinking of her with the

anguish wherewith we remember unattainable dreams. Each sweet, delicious day reveals her, with approach as subtle as Autumn coming to the wood. I dare not speak, lest that faint silhouette should fade. When firstling buds awake and mating birds return to fill the air with heartbreak, I know that she is near. In the soft calando of the breeze I hear her whisper, as though something were trying not to cry. Can I doubt that she is teaching me love and hope, things that children and beautiful women know? I see before me the fine lines of her graceful figure—her face of power and charm, radiant and immortal. My thought flies to that darling memory when, superb and undaunted, she placed herself between me and the Roman javelins. And more profoundly than ever in life I gaze into her eyes—those wistful eyes that saw so far beyond the things of earth!

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.



THE CHERUB AND THE LUTE.

TO ROSSO FIORENTINO'S "CHERUB WITH THE LUTE" IN THE UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE.

YOU magic darling of the scarlet wings,
And lashes black, and mouth so round and red,
Cuddling your golden lute, with curly head,
Drowsing and dreaming of delicious things
That cherubs know; your little song is sped;
Your little fingers loosen on the strings.
Oh, leave the lyre, and make my heart a bed,
For dear delight your baby vision brings.
Fold up your silver feathers; come to me;
With the last muffled murmur of your strain—
Sweet as the tinkling lark or honey bee,
Low as the rustle of the twilight rain—
Whisper some hope, some joyful mystery;
Then sleep awhile, and wake and sing again.

EDEN PHILLPOTTS.

A Drawing by Félicien de Myrbach

"So real in these years remains her phantom presence, so near and lustrous-eyed and kindling, that I wonder if, indeed, there be but a hand's-breadth between the living and the dead."

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VAINI'S LOVE.

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR

ILLUSTRATED BY FÉLICIEN DE MYRBACH.

I.

TO read a page in a man's love-making is to look into his heart. It is a glimpse we rarely possess, yet through it, alone, can we measure the perspective of his life.

In default of those amenities of fancy and colour and music which one who records a love story should possess, I bring to this narrative an intimate remembrance of those who chiefly moved in it, and who have all passed away.

I arrived in Rome shortly before Christmas, 1882. Seven years had elapsed since my last meeting with Professor Vaini, during which interval we had corresponded regularly, and I had often looked forward to a renewal of our experiments in a domain beyond human knowledge.

I had long listened enviously to the gentle call of Italy The Rome I was to see was greatly changed from the days of my studies a dozen years previously. There were still chimes and ringings and processions, and on the air a muttering of mass. In places its streets were modernised, but the Madonna and seraphs and allegories of love and damnation remained. To whoever cherishes the intellectual pictures of antiquity, the heart of Roma Amor opened its secrets of imperishable fascination. But the argonautic note of investigation had its reverberation even here. There was a lurking flavour of democracy that sacred incense could not extinguish, and I remember thinking that only the gleam of immemorial sunsets remained wholly the same.

In his latest dispatches my former tutor had vaguely alluded to a discovery of exceptional interest, to which he had applied his wide knowledge of the forces of life. He said he should require one of the "Chosen Few" to collaborate in the technique of his research, and inviting me to this service, wrote .

"In great problems I have taught you to be simple and direct. Therein lie the elements of pure force, and there, alone, can we find that concentration which is the essence of success. To me, existence is a thread lit and unlit by the sun. For once good fortune has met me half-way. The time is ripe, come quickly, and we will beat the gods at their own game."

The Professor was lodged on a slope of the Aventine in a humble building at the side of the Church of Santa Prisca. It was designated "the gardener's house," and its front presented a dingy entrance and some heavily barred casements. Once within, there were two excellent suites, one on the ground floor occupied by Vaini, and in that above, amid such comfort as rarely falls to a gardener, lived the curator of the church, his wife, their child, and two maids.

The Maestro's room was a cube of brightness in that solemn house. His windows overlooked a garden of stone paths, with odorous box-edging and myrtle and willows, and buttresses draped with flowering vines. It looked formal as that severe garden of the Escorial wherein Spanish kings and queens pursued their tortuous and sinister thought-drift.

On the morning of my first visit to this habitation I addressed a word of inquiry to a little girl who stood in the alley watching me with bright brown eyes. At Vaini's name she smiled and offered to lead me to the door. Could I have divined what curious shapes were to gather about that child, I should have observed her with more attention. As we walked I asked: "E tu chi sei—figlia del padrone?" A child so carelessly dressed could scarce have been the daughter of any padrone, and she laughed at the question.

"Figlia del giardiniere," she answered, continuing her plucking to pieces of a flower in the feminine pastime, "*He loves me—he loves me not.*" Her answer was to come back to me later with significance.

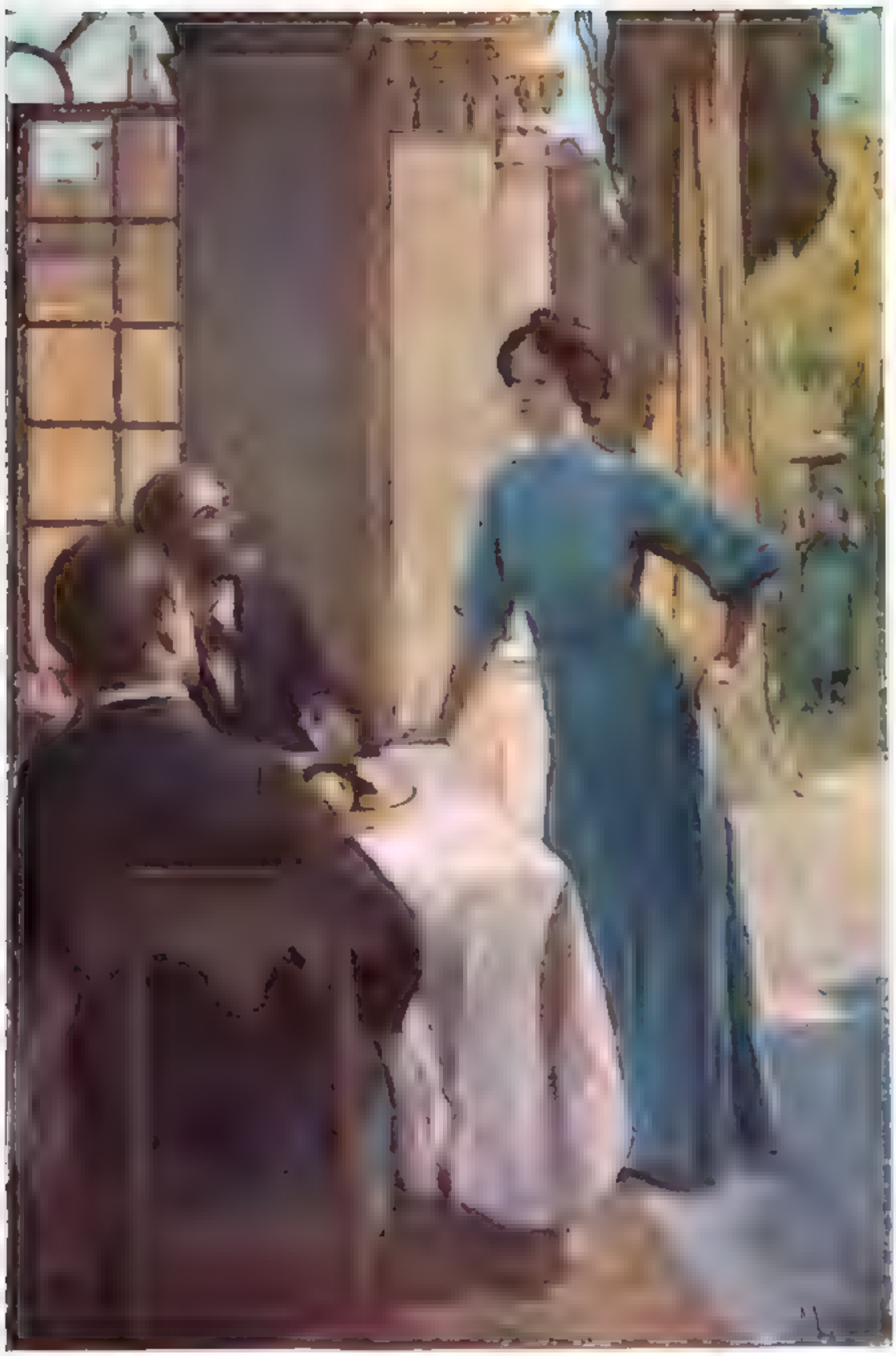
At the door of the house toward which she led, a handsome woman leaned, carelessly interested in my approach. There was a look of calm watchfulness in her deep-down hazel eyes which, as the days passed, I perceived they rarely lost. She wore a little golden comb, and in her attire was that mixture of colours wherein Italians delight. Her waving hair lay low on a broad forehead. She was still in the prime of womanhood, aged perhaps thirty, with the familiar Roman features of slumbering ardour. A tame tigress, I thought, glancing at the sinuous figure and the handsome, masterful face—a face that suggested some faint, far, meditative vision of "Arabian Nights." On hearing the Professor's name, her unconcerned look changed to one of pantherine grace as with caressing voice she invited me to the garden.

On my way to the loggia, where Vaini sat near a spread luncheon table, we passed the child's father, the curator-gardener, by name, Francesco Ottomana on whom, by reason of a physical characteristic, my former tutor had bestowed the appellation Bocca di Porco (pig's snout). He looked twenty-five years older than his wife, and his appearance, as he leaned on a rake, eyeing me with a puzzled-monkey air, and wearing a round, yellow sun-bonnet, adorned with feathers doubtless one of Madame Ottomana's discarded furbelows, was extremely comical.

The Professor rose from his amber chessmen to meet me "It is the knight's move," he exclaimed with a kindling smile, "that resembles the irony of Fate It is subtle as the elusive fourth dimension in mathematics. Nothing can interpose, and its stiletto stab passes our guard with the stroke of King Arthur's supernatural blade."

From our cheery greetings I glanced about at clipped cypress walks, the crumbling walls and arches of the palatine abode of the Cæsars, tinted in the thin, pensive December sunshine with imperishable bloom, to the roof of Ottomana's house, where, amid a fringe of teazel bristles, a single gargoyle looked down with stony leer. There was a soft susurra overhead of silver olives, and something in the air thrilled with the faint heart-beat of the dying year.

"Maestro," I said, "if I am here in response to your gracious summons, it is because I know that your measure of success is drawn at the border line of things impossible. What marvel of ancient days is to be recovered is the theme of my incessant musing After our tragical misadventure at Bath, seven years ago, with your Celestial Virgin, I fervently trust our business involves for me no more make-believe love-making."



A Drawing by Frederick de Myrbach

"Our frugal lunch was served in the loggia, which answered the double purpose of study and dining room . . . The gardener's wife came to assure herself that all was to our liking."

"Carissimo," answered the philosopher, pausing to observe the flattened curve of a swallow's flight, "the sea buries the miracle of its shells in unknown sands. But here comes the rizotto. 'Let us fall to,' as Isaac Walton says," he added, helping me to a goblet of Montepulciano. Our frugal lunch was served in the loggia, which answered the double purpose of study and dining room. A maid brought the plates and dishes, and the gardener's wife came to assure herself that all was to our liking.

I became not a little interested in that gardener's wife, whom, as the days passed, Vaini sometimes addressed as Signora Ottomana, occasionally as Eufrasia, and, in rare moments, by the caressing name of Fior di persico (Peach blossom). I admired the musical contralto of her voice, the lithe poise of her body, the satin-smooth coils of her hair, and her white, muscular hands as she drew off her gardening gloves. Her outline showed beneath the blue gown, and I remembered the swelling contours of Aphrodite of Melos. Something about the signora suggested that hidden "glory" which St. Paul has omitted.

"Is she not a beauty?" whispered the Maestro . . . . bellissima . . . . volupta!

"She looks," I assented as she came and went, "like some sandalled muse grown modern. I envy the gardener," I added, whereat she regarded me with a sidewise, flashing glance.

"I have come," I said, addressing her with gentle ceremony, "to taste the Roman gnochi my host praises when your hand prepares them." Her face flushed a little, and turning to me, she smiled a radiant answer.

"They shall not keep you waiting," she replied, as a maid came bearing the Professor's chafing dish.

"This seems a hushed and listening spot," I said, glancing across the garden. "I feel disposed to come here and share the Professor's studies!"

"My husband shall show you what our poet calls *the secret flowers*," she answered.

"I would rather see them with you," I ventured.

There sometimes comes in life a day which, ere it lapses, leaves an indelible mark In observing the master's *volupta fior di persico* I knew that some such day had come to me.

When we were alone, Vaini explained the scope of our research. "You remember," he began, "that when in the reign of Theodosius, pagan temples were closed in Rome and their marble divinities concealed, the Christians made great search for that Diana whose greatness the Ephesians had shouted to St. Paul When her renowned temple was pillaged and burnt, its sanctuary was empty Whatever the object was that typified her spiritual being, the Christians attached extraordinary importance to its destruction, and I doubt not that to escape them it had been removed to Rome as the only refuge.

"It is obvious that this fetish was more than an idol. The Greek mind in Paul's time had ceased to care for images, but here were supernatural attributes still exciting veneration. You, my favourite pupil in mystical craft, will readily guess what this object was?"

"Indeed, Professor," I replied, slightly disconcerted, "my mind is a blank on the subject."

"Must I recall to you the Black Stone of Mecca, a meteorite, and of its veneration for a thousand years by the Mahommedan world?"

"Do you mean," I exclaimed, greatly astonished, "that Diana of the Ephesians was a meteoric stone?"

"In outward form, yes," replied Vaini, amused at my surprise, "and brought, as I believe, to Rome and placed in the Sanctuary of Diana Aventina. Now the reason I am lodged where you find me is that the Church of Santa Prisca is built above that sanctuary, amid whose buried ruins I have been digging an hour or two daily these past five years.

"Let me add that I have often seen this meteorite, which is four inches long

Diana of the Ephesians

by two in width, largely composed of iron and covered with a shiny crust Upon its surface are streaks showing the flow of its parts when plastic. When my hammer sounded on a hollow chamber I knew the long-lost Diana was found. On entering that crypt I saw, by the light of my lamp, a mutilated female statue Originally half-nude, it had been covered with heavy terracotta drapery. In its outstretched arms had been placed a clay image of an infant, thus converting the pagan huntress to the Christian Mother and child. On finding that the image is composed of marble dust stucco I doubted not the meteorite had been buried in its bosom. As iconoclastic danger increased the change of subject was hastily attempted, and, finally, the figure was torn, in some hour of desperation, from its position, cast into an underground recess and walled up.

The Gentle Call of Italy.

"So now," concluded the Master drawing a long breath, "let us light a pair of lamps and descend to the crypt" He stepped to a work-table, on the grass, where stood several lamps and candles. In following him I struck my foot against a fragment of broken tile, beneath which lay a scrap of paper, whereon in a feminine hand, were the words in Italian, "This evening at nine," obviously the orthodox Roman method of assignation—from whom to whom?

My former tutor led the way without observing my discovery and, having placed a brilliant light in my hands, commenced the descent of a ladder where we closed and bolted the trap door in the floor of the loggia Counting my steps I calculated our depth, at the foot of the ladder, to be a dozen yards below the streets of modern Rome.

"We stand upon the virgin soil," observed Vaini, as we followed a passage,

the shaping of which had been his labour. Marble fragments, all greatly injured by fire, lay at our feet. We emerged upon a square chamber whose vaulted arch remained intact, and passed through the opening the Professor had made into the holy of holies. In the midst of bits of agate and cornelian pavement lay the life-sized female statue the Maestro had described, a pagan Diana holding in her outstretched arms the stucco fragments of the Virgin's child.

Snatching a ten-pound sledge hammer I dealt the figure half a dozen resounding blows that sent it flying in pieces.

A rapturous instant followed—one of those moments that Fate touches with a diamond—for there, embedded in Diana's bosom, was the meteorite the classic heart of Greece adored.

It was easily extracted, and breathless with emotion, we returned with it to the world of daylight. As we emerged from the trap-door into the loggia I saw a stranger watching us from a clump of cypress at the end of the garden.

"Who," I whispered, "is that hang-dog that comes to pry upon our doings?"

An expression of unwonted hate flitted across Vaini's face as he muttered the name—"*Atteone.*"

II.

I left my tutor alone with his flinty Diana, and wondered at the coincidence of his having so accurately anticipated its hiding place and predicted its appearance. The next day being Christmas Eve he was to dine with me, and I had promised to call for him in the afternoon.

On nearing Santa Prisca I saw, as on the previous morning, the child, *figlia del giardiniere*, awaiting me. She held a handkerchief to her face, her blithesome look quite gone, and with eyes fixed upon me made that deft sidewise movement of the body that in the code of Italian gesture-signals means DANGER. Instantly on the alert, I paused and asked: "What is your name, sweetheart?"

"Alcione," she replied, slightly repeating the same ominous movement.

Seeing that her nose was bleeding, I murmured: "You have been hurt; what has happened?"

Her eyes glistened, and I followed with attention the words of this little being who spoke with the decision of maturity. Twisting and untwisting her small handkerchief, and seating herself upon a block of masonry, she swung her slender limbs while whispering in a disconnected phrase: "Beware Atteone, he has struck me with his hand, he will strike you with a knife. Tell the gentle Professor that Atteone hates him."

"And why so much hatred?"

The smile crept back to her eyes. "My mother is yet young," she said with a furtive backward glance, "and so is Atteone. The Professor is not too old to love. He is often alone with my mother, and Atteone thinks that rose upon rock rooteth ill. Go, signor, wait no longer, we must not be seen thus."

Our colloquy had lasted but a minute, and knowing Italian ways, I turned and walked to the Ottomana gate, where a maid admitted me, pointing to the gardener who stood beside the well-head.

"I find you by the well," I said, "a happy omen for me, who at this moment am in quest of the truth which is sometimes at its depth."

"A well," answered Ottomana in a bantering tone, "is the haunt of Love. Beside a well Isaac's messenger met Rebecca. At the Midianite Well Moses found Zipporah. By the well of Haran Jacob beheld Rachel. It is a token of love and perfect knowledge that by a well the Master taught the woman of Samaria. Moreover," he added with a chuckle, "is not an old man's love a bucket in an empty well?"

"You are versed in Scripture," I answered; "but age is not always so cold as your proverb supposes. Was it a trace of your doings I found yonder yesterday

beneath a fragment of tile—a scrap of paper bearing the words, '*This evening at nine.*' Oh, lover of wells and gardens, what meaning was there?" And at this question Ottomana's lips hardened in a grim smile.

"Tell me," I added quickly, "who is the man Atteone I saw peeping and watching yesterday?"

The smile changed to a snarl as the gardener wove a complicated curse about the name.

"Who and what is he?" I asked.

"Cardinal Blackadder's secretary he was, and he has the heart of a cruel Puncinello!"

"I have reason to think he is here now. Has his presence to do with your wife or with Professor Vaini?"

Before the man could answer, his wife stood noiselessly beside us with heightened colour and quickened breath. How subtly beautiful she looked, and what wonder if the Maestro beheld in her the blossoms of his youth. We stood silent a moment with no sound about us but a twittering flash of swallows overhead. It seemed as though beyond the veiled dusk of that hour, beyond the crimson sunset's trailing plumes, beyond the pathos of autumn with its leaf-blown wake she had come from the heart of vanished things.

"The Professor will not keep you waiting" she said, carelessly rolling a cigarette; "he is talking business, let us rest a moment in the loggia."

We walked away. More and more impressed by the attractiveness of the old gardener's young wife, and greatly mystified by the warning of her little girl, I resolved upon an audacious venture. Remembering my tutor's piquant exposition of the knight's powerful move, it occurred to me to seek some such decisive action on the board where curious forces were gathering.

"Fior di persico," I began, taking her fine hand, "since those who love you know you by that name, in the country where I live there is a peach called golden heart. In poetic fancy, it is a type of things sincere. I ask you to be likewise golden hearted, and tell me why Atteone comes here with sinister motives?"

She drew a step away, then her defiance died unspoken. "Are you not taking advantage," she asked, "of the intimacy in which your friend lives here?"

"I suspect Atteone of some spiteful grudge," I replied. "It is his trespass that is to be explained . . . must I go to the Prefect of Police?"

She put out her hands in swift, appealing gesture, while I stood watching her bosom rise and fall. "Could I tell you," she ejaculated, "what you ask, without leading you to question me ever further, till from Atteone we came to ——"

"To Vaini?" I queried as she hesitated, "and thence to yourself. From allusions in his letters, I know that to you he has revealed that inner self which a man discloses only to the woman he loves."

"You see!" she interrupted, "it is the golden shuttle of your friend's romance you seek."

"I doubt not it is worth seeking," I answered, "and fine as the pastimes of Olympus. I shall ask Vaini."

The master's voice rang across the garden, and it did not surprise me to see Atteone issue forth and walk away, while the Professor shook his fist after him from an open window.

As he and I left Santa Prisca together, I could see that for all his self-restraint he was deeply angered I guessed the nature of his quarrel, and expressed it in the word *Ricatto* (blackmail). The Professor nodded in silence. That morning I had felt so concerned at his insecurity that I had visited the chief of Secret Police, and upon payment of a liberal bonus had arranged for his protection.

I had ordered our Christmas dinner with the malicious intention of tempting the Professor from his habitual abstemiousness, and warming him to concert pitch of confidences. A comforting cream soup, a baked spinola, a dish of *strangola preie*, and, lastly, his favourite mushrooms *sauté*. Short as a good dinner

should be, and moistened with a bottle of my Rainwater Madeira, followed by Lafite of '68 and Veuve Clicquot brut with the dessert.

As we finished, fresh logs were heaped on the fire and scalding hot coffee being served, I offered Vaini my flask of 1801 Cognac, observing in Bismarck's words, "*Those who conquer the world drink brandy!*"

"So to-day," he said, helping himself to a thimbleful, "you walked to the Gianicolo, and you have stood in the Church of Maria sopra Minerva, the Christian altar raised above the foundations of Pallas Athenæ. Eighteen centuries ago, both that and Diana Aventina were banks where plutocrats deposited their treasure beneath the wings of a virgin goddess. How often, gazing upon the remnants of those days, do I listen for the rhythm of ancient Rome, the flutter of its mighty soul!"

"You have often traced for me," I assented, "how one faith springs from the other."

"And with no less confusion now," he added, "than when Constantine's effigies gave him the proud attributes of the sun-god, of Christ, and of Cæsar Imperator."

"Do you," I asked, ready to humour my friend in his hallucination, "still exercise that second sight I knew in you years ago?"

"Per bacchissimo!" cried the philosopher testily, "it is sub-conscious, and does not need to be exercised. The glory that once was Rome—what is it but Time's picture, and its dome is horizon wide."

"Nevertheless," I observed, lighting a cigar, "it was all a lurid pandemonium!"

"Yes," agreed Vaini, his eyes fixed as though riveted upon the scene he described, "distraught between hates and pleasures, its body politic consumed, the nights ringing with violence, crazed in a delirium of myths and fables, smiting alike the Christian and the Jew, cruel, debauched, despairing such was Rome when it read its doom in the spears of the Goths."

"Were the ancients really more wicked than we?"

"Chi sà! Paganism revolted at the austerity of Christian marriage. Chastity and asceticism! Oh, master of the clarion and the lute, what were these to men who lived for lust? A woman had her child by the man she loved. Filled as we were with the worship of the body, what had we to say to a gospel that proclaimed, '*There be Eunuchs that have made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake.*'"

"Professor," I observed, "whenever in our studies you have revealed some such sudden shifting of the scene, a suspicion follows that in those heroic days you loved and were happy."

A stray shot occasionally flattens in the centre of the bull's-eye. The quick flow of words ceased, and it was with averted face that he murmured "It was a god's life, free and lawless!"

I pressed my advantage and asked reproachfully: "Vaini, are you hiding from me that your romance is interwoven with our meteoric stone?"

"You ask me," resumed my former tutor, turning to me with his usual calm, "to lead you among the mystic groves with the most beautiful woman that ever lived beckoning us on. Listen.

"One night before the Temple of Diana Aventina, seventeen centuries ago, swelled songs and the melody of flutes. Whoever listened doubted not that the goddess was shaping the souls of men. The priests chanted that the stone changed to flesh, or, being flesh, returned to stone. A flamen led me aside saying the goddess wished to give a command. We know that the Immortals talked with men and women, yet at that instant I felt face to face with elemental mystery. I was left alone in the half-light of a peristyle, whither a figure advanced with the steps of a splendid untamed animal. In its face were leadership and imperishable youth. Swift-footed, *volupta*, moving like a breath. From her shoulders hung a drapery now clinging to her hips and bosom, now fluttering loose. Whence came she if not from making the almond trees bloom at her touch?

"'Come,' she said, 'let us drink the wine of Olympus, which is love,' and she filled a cup. We stood alone, and her cool, soft lips were on mine. She laughed, saying: 'Let us be happy, for who knows if the gods prolong to-morrow their gift of to-day.' Oh, Belamore! Was it a summer's night's illusion or the passion of a lifetime? All smiling, she plucked a rose and gave it me, and we drew together as flame to flame, and she bade me remember that night and the savour of the rose." And Vaini paused, shading his eyes, as though from some blinding memory.

"Carissimo," he added, "do you know what is meant by the skyward flight of bees? There is one queen bee and in the hive a hundred that fain would love her. At the lovetime of the year the queen soars upward, the male bees following, the weaker or less ardent dropping back to earth. Still upward she rises, followed now by only a few. Presently one bee, the strongest, most passionate of all, is close. The rest have fallen away out of sight. The lover is alone with his bride, and there, far from all dross of the material world, he takes his pleasure of her.

"Such," whispered the Professor, "was my love of the Ephesian Diana. It was for ever; for who that has risen to the lips of a goddess would bend to a woman's caress?"

"It looks to me," I replied severely, "as though you have been tampering with a Vestal."

"Let me finish," said the Maestro, with a deprecating gesture. "She sent me to live in a forester's cottage amid the Nemi woods. I never knew in advance of her coming, which was always at the edge of morning between the dark and the dawn. Sometimes she remained but a moment, sometimes she lingered out the day. It was the season when blossoms whiten and birds sing and fountains murmur—when laurel and zephyr, the typical maid and her lover, meet. There would be a call or a whistle, and from under the trees she would come, fawn-like, morning-eyed, the peach blossom on her face. She knew bird-talk, and loved the life of all wild things. She could read the meaning of a falcon's flight and interpret secrets on the face of the rocks. On one such morning she whispered in a thrilling caress: '*Think of the men who have loved me, pursued me, died for me, and*——' as she spoke we heard the distant ululation of a wolf. Ere the sound ceased she called her brindle-black hounds and dashed away, and presently I caught a faint triumphant echo of her voice. Another day, in sport, she bade me cast wild apples to the tree-tops, and with her arrows split them as they fell.

"The shadows sleep beneath the vine she loved, and for me, when my eyes grow dim to the sights of earth, I shall still meet Diana and walk with her in the cool of the day." And as he finished a great log crackling in our fire glowed with iridescent tints of green and ruby as though the wild story had touched it with fantastic light.

"Of all your narratives," I interrupted, "this is the first that disappoints me. I hoped you would shiver the hour into sparkling atoms about Eufrasia."

"Cannot you see," retorted the Professor, "that all I have said leads to her?

"At first sight," he resumed, "I could not fail to be struck with Eufrasia's appearance. She walks with the swift, firm step, I remember. She is calm, alert, observant as the other. She has the same Narcissus lips, the same light-hearted laugh. Like Diana, she is wood-wise, and often watches the night into dawn. There were things I half-remembered and she half-forgot. At first she looked at me with wonder, yet I could see some recognition whispered. A woman retains consciousness of a former existence so much more distinctly than a man. Had a golden-footed coincidence led me back to my *fior di persico?*

"Yes, the old passion leaped into new being. Needless to remind you, I care nothing for women, and in this life never loved before or since. In her garden

"A figure advanced with the steps of a splendid untamed animal. In its face were leadership and imperishable youth. From her shoulders hung a drapery now clinging to her hips and bosom, now fluttering loose."

we walked one evening, while the past beckoned and spoke its ecstasy. The trees Diana loved stood motionless before Eufrasia. She plucked a rose and gave it me with smiling intention, praising its old-world savour. With what emotion I beheld that repetition—the same woman who centuries gone on that same Aventine had given me a rose!"

III.

The night being fine Vaini and I walked back to Santa Prisca together. Between Atteone and that dangerous Circe, and her brutish husband and their various vendettas, I felt concerned for his safety. When, as we neared our destination, the air rang with a man's shrieks for help—"*Aiuto! aiuto!*"—I understood how imminent had been the Professor's danger.

"It's nothing very alarming," I said to my startled companion, as I drew a five-chambered Colt, a weapon which the poniard-armed Italian of those days held in aversion. "Atteone, spying your return, has been surprised and stilettoed by a police official I placed here."

My surmise was correct. The guard, with knife still in hand, met us, and reported that, having observed a man—perhaps Atteone—skulking near Ottomana's door, he had arrested him. A scuffle ensued, when in self-defence he stabbed his prisoner, who, wrenching himself clear, had run off.

"Then he is not seriously wounded," I observed.

"Signor, it was in the left ribs I struck him, in the region of the heart. By the grace of God he will bleed to death in the night."

I dismissed the man, and wished my former tutor *felicissima notte*. But I did not immediately withdraw, for my eyes were fascinated by the face of the child Alcione peeping from a small window on the ground floor. When we were alone she beckoned me near.

"Did you see what happened?" I whispered.

"Yes, both saw and heard."

"What did you hear?"

"Half an hour ago Signor Atteone was talking with that watchman where you now stand. The watchman, who seems to know you, came suddenly upon him and threatened arrest."

"'How much are you getting for this?' asked the cappellano.

"'One hundred francs if I catch you, two hundred if I give you a coltellata in the ribs.'

"'Excellent!' exclaimed Atteone. 'Here are twenty more. When the Professor approaches you will feign your coltellata. I shall scream . . . and run. It will not be your fault if I escape.'

"Che commedia!" the child murmured, with a soft laugh.

"One word before I go," I answered in the same low voice. "This former chaplain of Cardinal Blackadder seems very intimate and familiar with your mother. What is he to her?"

"My mother once said she thought Signor Atteone is my father."

"Does he say so, too?"

"He says I am *figlia del giardiniere*."

"And what says Papa Ottomana?"

"He says I am *figlia del Padrone*."

"But which Padrone?"

The child drew back with a subdued ripple of mirth and closed the window.

. . . . . .

On returning to my hotel at midnight I dispatched two telegrams, one to the Chief of Secret Police, with whom I was acquainted, and one to Atteone. The following morning the clock was striking ten as a visitor was announced. The ex-chaplain was too shrewd to take the consequences of disregarding my summons,

and presented himself with the punctuality of a man of the world. He was a small, red-bearded personage, aged about thirty-five, holding in his sinewy fingers a gilt-bound snuff-box that bore the Blackadder ecclesiastical crest. I perceived no sign of a wound, and he saluted me with that unctuous suavity which to the ecclesiastical cloth corresponds with the bedside manner of a fashionable physician. Once acquired, that oily presence is never lost, and as he moved, unfrocked, one could fancy the rustling of a vanished *soutane*.

"Signor Atteone," I began, as he seated himself on the edge of a chair and watched me furtively, "you have been menacing the peace of Professor Vaini, and last night were nearly caught in your own snare. I am giving you a brief opportunity to explain, unless you prefer to discuss matters before a magistrate."

"You are enough to make the very stones weep," he ejaculated, with a lift of the brows. "You imagine you have trapped the wolf; it is a lamb you have by the throat."

"Wolf in the fleece of a lamb, or lamb with the fangs of a wolf, as you please. Suppose you begin by telling me the nature of your grudge against my friend."

"I have never harmed a hair of his head, though it would be but truth were I to say that he is possessed by a devil, an intelligent devil, like the wise serpent that in Eden pointed the way to the tree of Knowledge. He hath a collection of odd fancies, like the uncouth idols brought from far lands. This time Satan points him to a hole in the ground where he has spent years a-digging. Is it forbidden me to wonder why?"

"You remind me," I said, "that a week ago, carelessly overturning a stone in the Ottomana garden, I came upon a suspicious scrap of paper covered with Eufrasia's writing. Can it be that you and Professor Vaini were once rival suitors?"

"Why," he asked, feigning a startled reluctance, "reopen a long-closed book? Forgive me," he added, "if I take snuff; it is, in truth, a habit savouring of the lesser sins."

"Reopening your book," I observed, "shows me Cardinal Blackadder's name upon its shining page. Was he the father of Eufrasia's child?"

"Father of that imp that is old in wickedness! But, seriously, I see that you imply that when his Eminence had saved her life she bestowed upon him the return a handsome and grateful woman can make. In all honour, I do not think so. The Cardinal spoke of her as *Figlioccia*, god-daughter, which he would not have done had the relationship been profane."

"Who, then," I cried impatiently, "is the father of that fatherless child?"

"Who should be its father if not Eufrasia's husband? Sometimes," he added, chuckling, "the truth is like a flea—when you think to hold it the secret jumps."

"It is whispered that you are Eufrasia's lover."

"Signor, in this queer world we do what we can. When I was the Cardinal's secretary he often sent me to her with messages, or cakes, or wine. Those happy days were a gem that has found its perfect setting. Her life had been sad, its spring had been cold as mid-winter, yet all the world knows that it is in the glow of a mid-winter sunset that the hope and music of spring are kindled. Her voice was as fine as the drift-song of rivers. But, knowing I had awakened the dislike of both Ottomana and the Professor, I was on my guard. Moreover, I could not look upon her calm, imperious beauty and watch the allurement of that sweet, provoking smile without thinking of forbidden fruit. You see it was the very essence of that curious honey and gall we call life. And what is life worth if we get nothing from it?"

"I certainly have got very little from *you*, Signor Cappellano," I remarked, smiling at these last evasions.

"How could you expect much, or anything," he retorted, with comical misapprehension, "my stipend being so small. Rather might one have looked to find it the other way. How graceful would be a benefaction from you to

me, and how gratefully received! God loves a liberal as well as cheerful giver."

"And blackmail and stilettos, too, no doubt," I added, amused at the change imparted to our conversation. "One word in earnest to finish with. Suppose you leave Rome."

"Signor," objected my visitor, with an assumption of horror, "this is a cruel menace."

"There is a criminal court five minutes from here, and at Civita Vecchia is a convict prison. Between now and to-morrow noon your patron saint has time to lead you far from both. Farewell."

. . . . . .

Early that morning I had sent a message to my tutor's gardener bidding him come to me at once upon a serious matter. Atteone had been gone a few hours when Bocca di Porco made his appearance.

Bidding him be seated, I offered him a cigar. "Accept something better than those you commonly smoke," I said, "and answer a few questions. To-morrow Atteone may face a charge of felony, and unless your explanation is to my mind you shall also spend a few nights in the lock-up. Therefore, without further compliments, as the Romans say, what was the motive of the Cappellano's attack last night?"

Ottomana listened with fixed attention, and with the untroubled calm of one habituated to great and sudden danger. "I am bone dry," he began, lighting his cigar, "and with your leave will drink from yonder fiasco. Then I will begin at the beginning, and you shall observe how the truth peeps over the shoulder of a lie. Take my word for it," he added, with a genial smile, "most secret plans have a hole in them." He drained a goblet, and setting himself in an armchair, said:

"Signor, to return to the happy days of my youth, my home was at Olevano, the little town that artists delight to paint, and by trade I was a fortune-hunter. In the late 'fifties ransoms were large when we had the luck to catch a banker, or an *eccellenza*, or an English milor. But, short of being Columbus, one cannot always make an egg stand on its point, and my fate came in the shape of a grey donkey. On its back rode a woman disguised as a boy, who emptied a blunderbuss among us, killing two of my men, and grazing my neck with a nail. It was a silly vendetta; she had been supplying us with cheese and farina and brandy, and sometimes remained the night in camp. Our quarrel roused the good-natured police." And, with voice lowered to the growl of a wrathful animal, he added: "I was taken to the Castle of St. Angelo.

"Two days later I was startled with the announcement of a visitor, and made to wash myself. You could never guess who came—a cardinal! And I will refer to him by the endearing name his household bestowed—*l'aspe-nero*, the Black-adder. He had beautiful manners, and as he entered I knelt before the benediction of his hand.

"'My son,' he said, observing me curiously, 'would you prefer freedom to these bars? Next Sunday, if you like, you shall be back in Olevano eating *umido manzo*.'

"'My release is certain,' I answered; 'the *carabinieri* have been over bold to meddle with me.'

"'Have a care,' interrupted his Eminence with a warning gesture, 'reading the future savours of heresy, and the reward of a prophet hath often been stripes. Who dare affirm,' he asked with meditative reflection, 'that you may not live only just so long as it takes to dig your grave?'

"'*Emminenza!*' I stammered, crossing myself.

"'On the other hand,' he pursued, drawing forward a velvet stool an attendant had placed, 'there might be a comfortable home in this city with good wages and no more questions asked.'

"Not understanding, I suppose I must have looked pretty foolish.

"He had beautiful manners, and as he entered I knelt before the benediction of his hand."

"'There would be a wife also,' he added pleasantly, lifting his lusty face and glancing about to see that we were alone. 'She is handsome, buxom—*voluptà*—aged nineteen, and such fine white, even teeth! She will have a velvet marriage gown, two hundred silver *scudi* for house furnishing, and twenty for a wedding breakfast. Wine in bottles that day, mind you, no common *fiaschi*.'

"Signor," observed the gardener, interrupting himself, "you should some day ask Eufrasia to tell you her point of view of this story. To listen is better than drinking a cup of chocolate. In some bygone century, when Italians loved to gather under the arcades on rainy evenings and listen to the professional story-teller, some ancestor of hers held his dozens rapt and breathless, watching Bianca Capello's lover stabbed to death in the alley, or tracing the adventures of many a Desdèmona."

"To resume, then, you remember the affair of Mentana, how in October, 1867, Garibaldi gathered a few thousand *ragazzi* at Monte Rotondo, and but for the intervention of French troops, armed with their new *chassepots*, might have made an end of the remaining fragments of the States of the Church.

"Eufrasia was then a girl of eighteen, living with her mother, and earning her living as a telegraph operator. The Papal Zouaves cut the wires for miles, all but one they severed imperfectly. In her young days my wife talked Republicanism, sang the red-shirt song, and dreamt of a young *Garibaldino* who was shot through the head at Mentana. She contrived to attach an apparatus to the severed wire of her telegraphic station, with which she tapped the Papal military bureau, read the head-quarters' orders, and during eight feverish days telegraphed Menotti Garibaldi the march of the Zouaves, the approach of de Failly, the confusion and tremors of the Vatican.

"When suddenly her messages ceased, the Garibaldini knew she had been discovered, but they could not know that she had been sentenced to be shot.

"It is here that the Blackadder shows himself. Eufrasia married me with a sob beneath her laughter as is often the way with brides. She was fertile in exasperating tricks, a pink and white devil, *fior di persico* the illustrious Professor named her. It was commonly reported the Cardinal had saved her life, and that she—well, who is so bold as to say a pearl may not have some hidden flaw! He was an old man, but his nephew Atteone was young. Did I know Atteone? His grandfather stole fowls in the night, and his soul is red as hell. He was forever running errands between Eufrasia and the Cardinal. The sight of him sours the wine in my stomach. You do not think Alcione resembles him?" And the ex-brigand spat furiously on the ground.

"We were no sooner settled," he continued, relighting his cigar, "than the illustrious Professor came as a lodger, and within a month our porcelain tureen was broken, the cat died, and I cut my finger to the bone. He confessed to Eufrasia that the devil whispers him in his sleep. He is forever digging in the bowels of the earth, and when not thus employed betrays an odd inquisitiveness about unknowable things. It is impossible to reason with him—you might as well argue with the police. And yet with all his curious learning he cares not a *baiocco* what he eats, and could not tell a cutlet from cats' meat."

"So now, signorino, having made a clean breast and spoken as I do not talk to my confessor, you will give me leave to go my way."

IV.

The gardener's narrative faded away into the amber sunset's harmony. One goblet more of gallant wine, and in silence he bowed and departed. A phrase lingered in my thoughts. It was his suggestion that I should hear his wife's version of the events he had described. I therefore wrote the Signora Ottomana with suave Italian circumlocution, begging an interview, and upon her arrival at my hotel the following afternoon, I was amused at her odd misconception of my note. As our hands touched her eyes met mine with virgin coyness of

surrender. I motioned her to be seated, and briefly alluding to my conversation with her husband, remarked that many of the lesser tribulations of life could be removed by a little frankness.

Her face glowed with pleasure, and she scarcely waited for the end of my sentence. I remembered the Cardinal, the Blackadder of her youth, and wondered if he, too, had thought that to look upon her was like the grace of a summer morning. Had their meeting been to him a fateful instant subtle as that insidious knight's move the Maestro found significant of destiny?

"Tribulations," she repeated, brushing away a tiny diamond tear, "—of course you allude to my debts. *Una miseria!* How generous of you, they are trifling; by the *sacro santo*, a mere bagatelle."

"You mistake me," I interrupted. "The shadow of Atteone's plottings rested on your husband, and he has cleared himself without reserve, however clumsily. He said that could you be persuaded to speak to me as friend to friend the story of your life would be as the fluttering wings of dawn."

"I came to you," Eufrasia exclaimed, "with trepidation and a little hope." Then with a semblance of languor she added: "You who are a taciturn man know that deep emotion is silent." And she sat, without speaking a moment, watching me with feline intentness.

"I take you at your word," I answered; "let us adhere to the things we know. Vaini opened a volume whose pages seemed the heart of mystery. But what I beheld was indistinct, as something seen across a grape-bloom mist. Suppose you turn for me a few more of those brilliant pages."

"*Magari!*" cried my visitor, lifting her hand in a little wave of despair, "story-telling is as much a lost art as love-making. People, nowadays, have not time for either. I will say little.

"Let me begin by telling you that a dozen years ago, when very young, living in the agitations of a revolutionary time, I was sentenced to death. Perhaps nothing so awakens a girl's nature as the knowledge that she is about to die. Remember Jephthah's daughter, that was to be her father's burnt offering, bewailing her virginity in the mountains. The shapes I had feared as a child came forth again transformed from dwarfs to giants. Yet I no more feared than the nightingale fears the dark. Two days and nights I drifted among my girlhood's memories. Then suddenly the tragedy changed to a farce. My mother threw herself at the feet of a cardinal, and after our Garibaldini had been scattered, none cared what I had done, and his Eminence took me under the mantle of a fatherly protection.

"Signor," she exclaimed, suddenly lifting her eyes, "have you never felt an emotion, never longed that love might fold you into the bosom of the immortal hills? No, your northern blood is cold, nothing I can say moves you—not though I entreated you to become a father to my child!"

"We wander from the Cardinal," I interposed.

"In the end he made me marry a brigand and gave me the house where we live. Then of a sudden he died. We were moving to Santa Prisca when the illustrious Professor appeared. He wished that same property, wished it hungrily, and matters were adjusted by his becoming our lodger. How many weeks and months has he spent delving in the earth?"

"For what was he digging?" I carelessly asked.

"For what, indeed?" she echoed, "or what had I to do with Diana? In his exaltation did he take me for a goddess?

"He had been there a month when it happened. He had such endearing masterful ways, and when he spoke, something within me thrilled. It made me laugh when he declared he had loved me I know not how many centuries. At forty-five he was still handsome, and it was such a beautiful night, and my husband asleep. It is strange to remember how suddenly I loved him. By the hounds of Diana, was I not young in those days!

"That afternoon we had walked abroad together, watching where April wove

its tinted glory, and delighting in those immortal lovers, the sunshine and the rose. Now in the twilight we strolled up and down the cypress walks of Santa Prisca. Sometimes it seems to me my life holds but the single flower of that starlit incantation. The night breeze thrilled with imagined kisses, my life was empty and lonesome—what wonder if in that hour's fever we turned one to the other. The same silver-throated voice spoke on the same golden words. I would have died rather than spoil that perfect evening. Do you grudge me that once in my life I knew the divine spark. I named my infant *Alcione* in remembrance of that halycon hour. Oh, generous friend, if you would but be a father to that fatherless child!"

It was easy to discern Atteone behind the reticence of this confession, so I brought it to an abrupt conclusion.

. . . . . .

In 1907, twenty-five years after Vaini's discovery, the authorities excavated the Temple of Diana Aventina. They were surprised to find the passage my tutor had so laboriously opened. From the crypt we had entered they brought forth the fragments of a female statue.

I went to watch this labour of archæological savants, with one of whom I was acquainted. "It is noticeable," he observed, "that these walls have been disturbed in recent years."

"Yes," I answered, restraining a smile, "an adept in curious arts, named Professor Vaini, penetrated their inner shrine."

"How do you know this?" exclaimed the Italian, startled from his suave urbanity.

"I was his fellow-searcher," I carelessly replied.

"And did you find anything?" asked the learned man with professional jealousy.

"Yes," I answered, remembering the emotion of that wild adventure. "I found Vaini's Love."

. . . . . .

Twenty-eight years have flown since that "Merry" Christmas, and all mentioned in this story but I have passed away. The garden of Santa Prisca has been modernised, and its new *custode* cares for none of these things. I occasionally visit it, and always with unchanged interest, for in its shade Yesterday is marvellously interwoven with To-morrow. In springtime, beneath the Roman glory, that peach blossom, wherein Vaini read a transcendent meaning, still breathes its fragrance of immortal days. It is in such hours one feels that so long as roses strew their petals Nature will be young—that beneath winter's brooding the sweetest love-bird song is fashioned for the spring. And, musing, in that place which to this day retains an impress of his scholarly peace, I delight myself with the thought that when years ago Vaini's earthly day ended, he found not night, but the faces of friends.

It is here that in imagination I behold again Eufrasia, a figure of prismatic hues, as though her memory drew a sheaf of colours from the light. I recall her *bizarre* confession, a story trembling with the passion of her race, albeit that passion had grown lifeless as yellowing love-letters. I see again the hair parted Madonna-wise over Diana's brow, and the light in her eyes like a flash of garnets, and listen to the cadence of her voice. I remember that the sight of her was like awaking and opening my eyes upon the stars. In those heedless instants I was drawn to her by the thought that she loved flowers, and birds, and care-free things, and the calm of the wildwood and December's silver garden, and the furtive steps of spring. So vivid in these years remains her phantom presence, so near and lustrous-eyed and kindling, that I wonder if, indeed, there be but a hand's-breadth between the living and the dead. And it comes back to me that when the dying Vaini sank into his last repose, he said, with a sigh, "*Sleep is good.*" Then, suddenly rousing himself as in the presence of a new-found light, he whispered, "*Fior di Persico!*"

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

IN HORTENSIA'S GARDEN.

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FROM THE SILENT RIVER.

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR

I.

IN the brief revival of classical archæology at Naples which marked the reign of Murat it did not escape those who busied themselves with Pompeii and Herculaneum that many points of the bay, such as Bagnoli, Stabiae and Vico, gave indication of buried Roman houses. At Sorrento in 1830, while laying the foundations of a hotel, part of a villa was laid bare and wholly destroyed, its more important portion being under an adjacent monastery.

A few years ago, when Professor Vaini's villa passed to me, I removed that disused monastery and came upon an ancient construction. It was easy to trace the familiar outline—peristyle, atrium, tablinum or parlour, a cubiculum which had been the porter's lodge, and a flight of stone steps leading down to the dining-room, kitchen and wine cellar. The rear part, which must have included the bedrooms, had been obliterated in building the hotel. The house thus exposed had once been a large and luxurious residence that, left to a state of abandonment, had become filled with its own débris. There were indications of an upper wooden story which had perished by fire, and its destruction was perhaps at the close of the first century of our era. Its excavation, which covered twenty-one months, was confided to an expert, and conducted under my own supervision.

The marble pavement was nearly intact, and the walls were so well preserved in soft earth that in places the original colour and decoration remained. The colonnade was almost complete, only a few pillars having split and disintegrated, and half a dozen capitals fallen. Roofs, rafters and ceilings had totally perished. At the entrance, in black and white mosaic, is the inscription:

HOSPES PULSANTI TIBI
SE MEA JANUA PANDET

"Stranger, if you knock, my door will be opened to you"—a more genial salutation than the well-known *Cave Canem* of Pompeii. In two places on the walls are graffiti painted on the stucco, perhaps by the owner's hand, one being verses

of the Ode addressed by Horace to Dellius, and the other an apparently original composition of poetical character. In the wine cellar is a verse scratched in faulty Latin, the jest of a slave, the sense of which is as follows

> Two white, startled nymphs dashed away to the river,
> Mid shouts of a satyr borne o'er the whispering vine.
> Down the hillside they fled, leaving their laughter,
> Nearer leaped the satyr, cajoling, beseeching, commanding,
> A splash—they are gone. Lost in the deeps of the river.
> "A plague on all water fowl!" muttered the satyr

"Amid several marble ornaments was half a memorial stone six feet high."

On the atrium floor lay a statue of the boy Bacchus which had stood as a fountain at the side of the impluvium, and scattered about were fragments of bronze tables and chairs. It made one's heart leap to watch the excavation, to see

ancient objects brought to light, and to be the first to tread again that classic pavement.

Amid several marble ornaments in the uncovered garden, and close to the monastery wall, was half a memorial stone six feet high. In some bygone age it

MVTAE
SANCTI
SA
HORTENS
EVNOE
TICLAVDIVS
FLORVS
CONIVGI CARISSIMAE
DOMINAE DVLCISSIMAE
INDVLGENTISSIMAE
PIISSIMAE BONI
ANIMAE LOCVPLETI
CANDIDISSIMAE
SIMPLICISSIMAE
IVCVNDISSIMAE
EXCELLENTISSIMAE
BENEMERENTI
BONO DIGNISSIMAE
CVMQVAVIXI BONI VITI
COMPLVRIBVS ANNIS
SECVRA FACTA EST VIDVS OCT
CORELLIO ET VETTONIANO COS
ARA DEDICATA EST NONIS MAIS CA

TRANSLATION.

To the Silent Tutelar Deity

A place consecrated to the sainted Hortensia Eunoea; a dear spouse, charming kind and devout, generously furnished with an excellent mind, courteous, sincere, genial and distinguished, well deserving of every good; a worthy lady with whom I, Titus Claudius Florus, have lived a good life for many years. She was rendered free from care on the 11th of October, and was buried during the Consulate of Corellius Vettonianus. By command of her husband this altar was dedicated on the 7th of May.

(The inscription was reconstructed in its entirety, the conjectural restoration being shown in lighter letters.)

had been sawn vertically down the middle, the missing half having doubtless served as building material. When the fragment that remained had been placed upright, half an inscription was deciphered, to which I devoted some studious hours. It became evident that herein lay a clue to the story of the house, and

my labour was rewarded as tentatively phrase by phrase, the inscription was reconstructed in its entirety, the conjectural restoration being shown in lighter letters.

The lower floor of the villa, which had been hewn in rock, and is on one side open to the sea, was easily cleared. When the rubbish which choked its flight of steps had been removed, I entered an ante-chamber and crossed the wine cellar wherein leaned a score of terra cotta wine jars. Beyond was a large dining-room, with arched ceiling and an open balustrade overlooking the Bay of Naples. Beside this triclinium is the kitchen, with ruined stone oven, granite pestle and mortar, and fragments of bronze cooking utensils. I realised that an important discovery had been made, and delighted myself in visiting those silent walls, now reopened to the sky. How wonderful a transition it was to pass at a step from the trim paths of my cloister garden—from the green and silver of its olives, with their calm ascetic shade, and the dismal Christian emblems the monks left there—to a fragment of the golden Surrentum of classic days as fresh in its reappearance as the pressed leaf which after half a century retains something of its pristine brilliance. Even the sunshine seemed to me transfigured to an unusual splendour, remembering how passionately the ancients were heliophile in their love of the sun.

Several times during my researches I heard the voice of a crying child, faint and remote, yet apparently within the excavation. It was a sound of intense anguish, beyond ordinary pain—a wailing of weird significance. I called the nearest workman, and asked who had brought a crying child. After a moment's listening, while the sound died tremulously away, he gave me the conventional reply, *chi lo sà?* The men working above had heard it, and to them it seemed to come from below. There was no child to be found, and the sound ceased for that day. Chancing to meet the porter of the adjoining hotel, I asked if any of the employees had heard this noise, and he seemed amused as he answered with twinkling eyes of Italian humour: "Surely, Signore, in a rabbit warren (*tana di conigli*) such as Sorrento there are swarms of children, and who gives heed if one should cry!"

In resuming my examination of the triclinium I raised an amphora or wine vessel that had fallen with its nozzle buried in sand. Like the others, it had originally been sealed with wax, the usual method of preserving wine. I was surprised to find slightly protruding from it a yellow-stained papyrus that, owing to the waterproof character of its receptacle, had escaped destruction. I returned to the Villa Sirena, and, having moistened the paper with a wash of vaseline, flattened it on my work-table and found that it comprised three separate scrolls, one within the other, each covered with tolerably legible writing. I washed these scrolls with a camel's hair brush dipped in hypo sulphuret of ammonia, and dried each quickly with fresh blotting paper. By this process the faded words were rendered decipherable, and my assistant copied out the writing before the brown ink perished from exposure

It was the work of weeks to make a free translation of the first-century Latin into English. The outer scroll was the writing of Dexter Quintilian, an aedile (magistrate) residing at Vicus, the neighbouring modern Vico Equense, the next was the work of Hortensia Eunoea, owner of the villa; the last having been written by Titus Claudius Florus, her widower. They differ in size, quality of paper, handwriting and colour of ink, and form the points of view of three persons as to a homicide of which Florus was suspected. They might be likened to a modern solicitor's packet of documents. Their united version is a plea of "not proven." Their narratives are more a review of the events of several years than a defence against the charge of assassination. Half a dozen years had elapsed when Florus wrote, and if guilty he must have felt the security that lapse of time brings. Dexter Quintilian arrays the facts and evolves from them his friend's justification The crime is mentioned as having been committed the year after

Looking from the Cloister Garden into the Villa Florus.
The portraits on the Sarcophagus are supposed to be those of Florus and Hortensia

the destruction of Pompeii, which happened A.D. 79, but it is not until two years later that the suspicion against Florus becomes so acute as to place him in danger of a prosecution, from which he was saved by the favourable report of his friend the aedile who had been sent to investigate. The three letters collectively present a dramatic picture, and the recitals are illumined by curious allusions. Hortensia's description of her infant's death has the sinister accent of biblical tragedy. The killing of her first husband having occurred A.D. 80, her marriage to Florus took place in 81, and if the consulate of Corellius Vettonianus was in 87 (reign of Domitian) Hortensia was aged about forty-five at the time of her death.

In the intensity of their narrative we meet these people living and not dead, and know them intimately for an hour. Their manuscripts may have been secreted in an empty wine jar in the haste of some sudden alarm. It does not appear how the roll came to be in the possession of Florus at his wife's villa, where we find him residing after her death, but if he were still apprehensive, he would naturally preserve at hand this testimony to his innocence. The picture flashed from these scrolls presents the murdered husband Eutychianus, a Greek, surnamed Comazon; Florus, who writes with something like poetic fervour; Hortensia standing wistfully still amid ill-fated days; and their friend, Dexter Quintilian, beneath whose phrase one cannot but perceive that he, too, loved Hortensia.

Quintilian and Florus were tribunes in Judaea, probably serving with the XII. Legion about A.D. 68–69. In the years of siege and sack and slaughter that preceded the taking of Jerusalem they must have witnessed fearful atrocities. In half a dozen years over one million Hebrews perished, many of them prisoners sacrificed to Jupiter and Mars according to custom before the Roman eagles. What wonder if through the centuries those emblems came to be known to the conquered of all nations by some such name of horror as the Master used when speaking of them to his disciples: "The abomination of desolation standing where it ought not."

After reading Hortensia's story I understood the mystery of the child-voice lamentation. It is occasionally heard, always within the ruined walls, yet infinitely remote, always perfectly human albeit thrilling with preternatural distress. But now, since it appears that the wailing of the boy Laetus is as much a part of my excavation as the ocean murmur is inherent to the dead sea-shell, I no longer heed this voice from the silent river.

II.

Dexter Quintilian to Hortensia.

Hortensia,—I dip my reed in the brown since you so bid me, knowing it is right you should possess my judgment as magistrate, as well as friend, upon the accusation brought against your husband in this jarring scheme we call life.

The facts present a grave contradiction demanding of a judge that refined intellectual perspective he must borrow for the occasion of the nearest philosopher. There is a probability that at the moment of the crime Florus was miles away, but against it stands his curious aberration which almost assumes the character of self-accusation. No one saw the assassin, and the only motive for the crime that has ever been suggested is offered by the accused's marriage to you less than eight months after your first husband was slain. That a man of Florus' public standing should have placed himself in the power of men hired to commit a crime is unlikely.

In the study of homicide, we begin by reconstructing the tragedy with its *dramatis personæ*, applying our gaze where there is nothing now, only the conjectural something that was. This is the first step toward approaching the heart of the motive that swayed the criminal. We place in symmetrical line the

The entrance connecting Villa Florus with the Cloister Garden
Ante-Room, Wine Cellar Triclinium, Kitchen

circumstances so far as established, and this we call evidence. Only, as all the world knows, evidence sometimes plays the game with loaded dice.

It was in Judaea, campaigning against the Hebrews, that I first met Florus, both of us being tribunes in the same Legion. Two years were spent marching, killing, besieging, and burning. One day at the storming of a gate at Zebulon, as we stood looking on together, we saw a band of Hebrew girls, armed and habited like archers, appear above the rampart. They bent their bows with great harp strings, and one flung a hammer which struck me in the face, leaving its indelible print on my lip. "I have spoiled thy mouth for kissing!" she screamed, lifting her arms with a shrill laugh of triumph. Quick as thought Florus raised the Parthian bow he held and sent an iron bolt deep into her body. When I heard the charge that was brought against Florus and the manner of Comazon's death, I wondered if the assassin, whosoever he might be, had also a Parthian bow.

I wonder if you remember my wife Pantheia? In moments of anger she was wont to look at the scar and whisper with her slow diabolical smile, "the Hebrew girl said right—*spoiled for kissing!*" We were living in Pompeii two years before it perished, and she made of my house a resort of those who at night practise rites of Isis, bringing there the priests of the moon goddess to sacrifice with mischievous dances and the flutes that breathe such deadly poison. Wherefore coming one evening into their midst, I chased the Egyptians back to their temple, and taking from Pantheia the house keys, turned her out of my door.

I often meditate upon those earlier days, when Florus and I were together, and he may sometimes have talked to you of our adventures in the midst of the hate of that Hebrew people, which despite their ruin is not yet subjugated. It was a joy to be a soldier, for the Legion was supreme. It was the school that formed men who brought to the task of conquest a capacity that touched them with the ideals of those who led. Hard and scarred, a Legion was no bad type of concentrated force. What wonder if the sight of its spears lifted the mind—if the blare of its bugles thrilled the heart!

Now we have fallen upon evil times, and musing upon the havoc of Pompeii, I ask myself if that awful scene foreshadowed a wider devastation. Ruined and dead. Can that become the fate of Rome? Yet ever, listening to the music of a marching column, filling the sky with its challenge, I believe that ages hence, when Rome has ceased to be, that sound shall still ring down the centuries, while a remembering world may whisper—so sang the unconquered!

You ask me to review the facts upon which my report to the Governor rested. Florus declares that on the afternoon of the crime he was at Vicus, which a runner might reach in an hour from Surrentum. After the lapse of a year, time of day cannot be determined. Often the best memories are not sure of a day, nor whether it was the Nones or the Ides when something happened. Domitia Lepida is able to declare that Florus was speaking with her at the door of her shop when the earliest word of the crime reached Vicus. Some hours sooner, your first husband Eutychianus, better known by the nickname of Comazon, embarked at Vicus with the boatman Sisibius, son of Gela, the blind one. He wished to sail to Surrentum, and so ordered his departure as to arrive there before sunset. He is not known to have had an enemy, nor to have been recently involved in a quarrel. Men remember little of him beyond his old-fashioned Arcadian frugality, and that when he pleased he could give his words a whip-lash sting. Surrentum laughed at his priding himself on being descended from that primitive Greek race whose women, when every male had been slain by the invader, stabbed their conquerors in their sleep, dishonour being thus changed to glory.

When within half a mile of the landing beach Comazon asked to be put ashore at the point of rocks where a footpath ascends, and the statement of Sisibius is our guide as to what followed. Immediately upon stepping ashore, and while

preparing to climb to his villa, Comazon was struck in the middle ribs by an iron shaft fixed in a hard band of cloth which caused almost instant death. Whoever discharged that bolt held a weapon of extraordinary power in whose use he was an adept. Sisibius, greatly terrified, leaped back into his boat and made for the landing-place, where he told what had happened. The town watch, followed by some idlers, hastened to where Comazon lay dead. Bending over the body leaned Passienus the dancer and Beryllus the barber. They declared that descending the cliff to bathe they heard Comazon's death-cry. They averred that the shaft could only have been discharged by one hidden in the bunch of trees near by called rustling pines. Comazon spoke but once, with ferocity. *The boatman led me into his trap.* The hiding-place was searched, but the assassin would have had more than time to escape. As to his ejaculation, did Comazon see and recognise the assailant? Into whose trap had Sisibius led him? The barber told me a straightforward story. Beryllus is a tipsy clown, but no suspicion attaches either to him or his companion.

What weapon was used to send that heavy missile flying? May it have been one of those hand catapults with whose mechanism Archimedes beguiled his leisure three centuries ago? It is an odd coincidence that the boatman went raving mad before the month ended.

I examined the fatal bolt and visited the scene of Comazon's death, the grove of rustling pines. It is forty paces from the landing beach. On the day I was there some fishermen were gathered about a kettle singing a familiar chant which Beryllus, who had come with me, said was being sung out on the bay by these same men at the moment of Comazon's death. By Mercury, the vigilant, how many were looking on, yet saw nothing! Their silly song caught my ear, though it was but the refrain of "Sea-sand turned to gold."

From the silent dark of his grove,
From the sunset heart of the day,
The sun-god beckons smiling.
His lips are forever tuned with song,
"Oh give to me," he cries, "this hour,
Are we not sprung from an equal dust divine!"

I smiled at the thought of what our grandsires—most of whom still clung to the Immortals—would have done to a parcel of fishermen whose audacity imagined them "sprung from dust divine." I sent Beryllus to bid them come, which they did abjectly enough, and spoke up forthwith when I told them my business. They contradicted the testimony of Sisibius in a notable particular, saying that passing quite close they overheard Sisibius beg Comazon to land at the point, as he dared not venture to the beach, being under sentence of a whipping if found at Surrentum. Admitting this to be true, then so far from Comazon asking to land, it looks as if the boatman had knowingly put him ashore to meet his danger. The fishermen added that they gave small heed to what was said and had passed on out of view.

Now comes the suspicion that first attached to Florus, when after only eight months you married him suddenly in the presence of a few intimates—you, the rich and childless widow of a man you had both detested. That you had been the love of his youth was no secret. Is it strange that people asked if his hand had bent the fatal bow? When questioned in my presence—a painful ordeal for us both—it is not unnatural that after the lapse of so long an interval he could give no account of his whereabouts other than that on hearing of the homicide he had hastened to you.

My judicial inquiry was made two months after your wedding day—that day of inauspicious incidents when it seemed some malevolent spirit cast ill omens in our teeth, from the illness of the priest to the theft of the wedding cake and the breaking of the chalice that fell. And yet I remember that day as one remembers the sunshine of some childhood we have lost. It brought back the

The Colonnade leading to the House of Florus.

promise of my own marriage, and I delighted in the joy of my friend. Your garden spoke with the liquid voice of a nymph. From its walls fell rose garlands in cascades, and your Babylonian hangings seemed like summer's tapestry. I felt that for once it had been given me to behold the rapture a day may bear in its heart.

And you, I shall never forget. To this day I think of you with hushed pleasure, as we think of last May's roses. You stood welcoming your guests, charming, delicate, and rhythmical, unperturbed even when your freedman Gehasi handed you dried, *dead* fruits, and silence followed. I divined that you are a poetess in your dainty, fugitive way, and the sight of you brought a sense of fine reeds bending by the river, of something brilliantly touched with romance, of the verse of a carefree song. Over a long tunic of linen your mantle was thrown back from the statuesque contours. And when taking your hand I murmured my salutation, your face flushed like the pink of dawn, wherefore remembering likewise the sinister omens of that hour, I urge you, if only for the sake of your newborn baby boy, to pour abundant libations to Hermes the interceder and to sacrifice to all the

(Last lines discoloured and illegible.)

III.

Thus far had I deciphered, doing my work in the sunshine of Hortensia's garden, aiming to seize the spirit of each writer's words and often reproducing them in modern form, when on reaching the end of Quintilian's writing its reference to Hortensia's "new-born baby boy" impressed itself upon me, and I wondered if behind it lay that voice of a crying child.

Each morning my work-table—covered with writing paper, the manuscripts, a Latin dictionary and grammar and some books of classical reference—was brought from its shelter in the atrium to a shaded angle in the peristyle, whence I looked across the Bay of Naples to Vesuvius and Parthenope. About me grew a profusion of hyacinths, and some golden-dusted mullein stalks were climbing the broken wall. The ruins of Hortensia's habitation, with their warm whiteness, seemed a daintily-carved ivory toy placed on a table of grass-green jade. It was in April, when the Italian springtime draws near on tiptoe. Beyond the cloister wall a couple of olive trees the friars had planted rose gnarled and grey, their silver branches flickering. I watched the sunshine piercing the leaves, and listened to the undersong of the sea. Beyond Misenum the saffron distance was tremulous with light of pearls. In those perfumed hours that garden's subtle dark spoke with an accent of intense significance. My thoughts were with those bygone days that must have been as beautiful as these. On the air was a murmur of things lovely and unknown, like the magic of unfolding colour, and the living glory of the air made me quick to understand that my task held a mystical revelation where immortal chariot wheels had left their trace.

Hortensia's Reply to Dexter Quintilian.

How shall I thank you, wise and gentle friend, for the good letter I have carefully preserved, yet left unanswered all these months?

I must begin by telling you the saddest word I have ever written, and writing I wonder if indeed the secret of life's futility lurks on the cynical lips of the gods. Laetus, my baby boy and the child of Florus, is dead, and every day now I hear death walking in the garden. It was two months ago, in the dawn of a winter's morning, and you who know the operation of extraordinary forces, shall tell me if from beyond our earthly ken a hand was outstretched.

When Comazon married me and took the roses out of my youth I resolved to

retain the mastery over myself and lead my own life. He was old, a pale, white rustic of a man, full of Greek cunning. My guardian, who made the marriage, called him "Rabbit-ears," since in excitement those appendages of his quivered and shifted. He had a clown's fury behind a cringing smile. His appearance reminded me of an amphora that is brought crusted and stained from the cellar. What he called love was a cupid painted on the wall. Now that his spirit has passed, I entreat you to tell me if it can have power to return from the Stygian pines?

His death came in the midst of my soul's starvation—and after came Florus. When we were young—lad and girl together—we used to look in one another's eyes. I think of myself with infinite compassion in those girlish days. Once he kissed me, and that kiss burned into my life and made it his. Now, after five years' misery, he found me in the enchantment of my garden. Having never lost the sensitive instinct of youth, I have preserved a full-blooded love of wild things, and am never so deeply thrilled as when the voice of the forest speaks its everlasting truths. I was living alone in this home—which you once called a cup of opalescent crystal—alone, with Florus to come and see me every day. Can one handle fire thus, hour by hour, with never a scorch? Yet how could I resist the alluring love of my life!

Yes, Florus came, light of foot and masterful, with persuasive lips and the grace of sweet thoughts. One blue summer's evening he repeated to me the mosaic of Calvia's song, how the sun-god and Ariadne kissed, "only to kiss the air," repeated the refrain, "the air that kissed her." And my laughter ended in a sob. I was so happy that the tears rose to my eyes—I who have often said we women get from our men something of that flinty fibre which is the heart of Rome. All through those days, in the delight of the eager sunshine he had brought, the twilight of empty brooding ended. Each morning took on its own poetic lustre, and I lived anew in the traditions of these shores and headlands. I laughed to remember that satyrs with passionate eyes were said to lurk in the Pompeian byways. Often we sat together among the trees that go down-crowding to the water's edge. The jewelled bands of light and colour that came and went against Vesuvius seemed a type of antique splendour as though a transfigured vision of Troy and Carthage flitted by.

It appears that you, too, Dexter Quintilian, remember the wedding day—the milky lace of breaking waves, the scent of sacrificial fire, the thousand tiny things in Nature that fain would lift their little voice. I remember how with a snatch of song was loosed for you the sixteen-year-old wax of my choicest amphora. And drinking that purple Setian you arose and, as the Athenian flute players rippled to silence, you declared amid the clapping of hands that ages hence strange races coming after us shall taste the splendour of our Roman life as it were old wine!

We had not long been married when a murmur of public suspicion reached Florus, and over his face came a subdued look as across the sea steals the gathering dusk. I listened awestruck when he told me that returning in the brooding twilight the spirit of Comazon stood at the door and waved him back. That this had been several times repeated, that he had rushed upon the phantom, which vanished at his touch. That the spectre called him by name, its voice being elusive and mocking as a woodpecker's far-away tap. All the evening we sat silent together watching the star-clusters shaping fantastic hieroglyphs for men to read. Beside my garden's fragrant breast I listened to the sea whispering its foreboding of the ruthless to-morrow.

Next morning came to us Gehasi, the Hebrew, become a Christian, whom Florus brought from Zebulon and hath freed. The same, for all his broad black brows, is grown soft with butler's service, and offered to accuse himself of the murder of Comazon, and confess to it if by so doing he could save his master. He spoke as hushed as a breath of air. By Hercules, the traveller, he cometh

"Beyond lay a large Triclinium or Dining-room with arched ceiling."
On the sacrificial Altar is a figure of a youthful Bacchus.

from a strange land, and bringeth far-fetched imaginings—one whereof he hath scratched on the plaster wall of his lodge :

Thy sins, which were many, are forgiven.

When I questioned him about that graffito, he said that fifty years ago they had been spoken to his mother, whom he remembered as a pale, grey-haired woman. She had once been beautiful, and in its red splendour the long hair had been her wicked pride. Till, having become bitten by the acids of wayward lovings, she had anointed with passionate tears the feet of one that was crucified, and wiped them with the gold of her head.

Before the day was spent that terrible suspicion was in every mind. It was in the eyes of Demetrius, the eunuch, tidying my toilet table ; it was in the atrium's pensive splash of falling water ; I heard it in the crooning of the slave girls over their kitchen kettles, I *felt* it was written upon Nature's outdoor scroll, I caught it in the repetition of a knife-grinder's sing-song ; and Florus, listening, glanced furtively over his shoulder. . . . Yet behind the anguish of that look I perceived that he saw nothing, that his mind was far away.

Soon after, *you* came—our mists vanished, and I listened in silent joy. Your words that showed my Florus guiltless were sweet as the tuning of lutes. In an hour the discords of life fell away. It was as though you had restored the key of some remembered garden. The smiling side of life rekindled as it does in the hearts of mariners sailing by night over unknown seas when a breath of scented grasses whispers the land is near.

I have told you that two months ago our child, Laetus, died. That day my youth passed from me. A foreboding had crossed my sleep as though shapes made and unmade themselves. You will say they were but waves of the night, or the wind singing of the sea. I awoke, and, looking forth, beheld the pink of early dawn, and heard the patter of phantom feet. In the next room, the door between being open, lay Helvia asleep, and beside her the boy. Near the pillow was the child's nursing bottle, and all this I saw by the spark of a dying night-wick.

All was still, yet from the heart of that silence rose a strange vibration. That dying spark was the red omen of an advancing shape which was Comazon. It noticed me not, but taking the child's bottle poured therein something that went gurgling down upon the milk. At the instant the child stirred, and Helvia sat up and gave Laetus his bottle. Then, as the spectre vanished, the child drank, whilst I stood riveted. A cry rent the night—as keen as the child-like scream of a wounded hare. At which the blood rushed to my heart, and I lighted a taper and summoned Florus and aroused the slaves. Three hours after that tiny soul had sped to the solution of its own mystery. Now with that outcry still ringing in my ears, I ask myself how the stars can shine so brightly upon an anguished world.

More than this, I know that I, too, bear upon me the marble signature of death. It was Comazon that killed my child—that will kill me, for out of the half-light his hand beckons, and his lips move in a summons only I can hear.

Farewell. The circle of my life is rounded, and that grey presence bids me go. Presently over these walls the unremembering years shall close, though it seems to me that beneath their ripple must ever linger a stain of these things.

HORTENSIA

IV.

I began deciphering the manuscript written by Florus with an interest greatly heightened by my study of the foregoing narratives. It will be observed that he makes no circumlocution, but utters forthwith the emphatic denial of one who considers himself manifestly innocent. In important particulars his statement varies from the facts accepted by Dexter and Hortensia. He has his own theory

" The Wine Cellar, wherein leaned a score of terra-cotta wine jars.

as to the part taken in the crime by the fishermen, and his wife's terrors, which weigh against him, are dismissed as hallucinations. In his opinion the shock resulting to her from a public suspicion produced mental aberrations, which became so intense as to create an illusion regarding Laetus, and ultimately to become the cause of her own death.

The character of Florus, scantily revealed, receives a curious sidelight from the subtleties of his self-justification. Was he misjudged by that blundering sot, *vox populi?* He tasted bitter hours, and presents that spectacle the ancients loved, a strong man battling against great forces. I cannot doubt that the graffito on the atrium wall was traced by his hand—that in dwelling upon his favourite lines to Dellius, the sense of which I have rendered very freely, he was thinking less of the beauties of Horace than of his own sad heart:

Cherish, O Dellius, a tranquil mind,
Whether amid the good or evil things of life
Not uplifted by the pride of thy success,
Remembering that thou too must die.

Let thy joy be in Nature's sweet repose,
Amid the shade of interlacing boughs,
In some fine seclusion where the streamlet
Goes musically rippling far and far away.

MANUSCRIPT OF TITUS CLAUDIUS FLORUS.

Quintilian,—I have lived my life, and am ready to meet that decisive experience that awaits us all—whether beyond that dim portal our eyes shall be opened, or are to remain forever closed. But first to you, my life-long friend, I have somewhat to say, knowing that the truth will not tear in your hands.

I have never wearied myself with vain and fugitive trifles. My passion has been the study by analysis and comparison of such grains of absolute truth as Plato and Socrates gleaned. Have we advanced a hand's-breadth, think you, since their day? From that study alone may we derive those elements of intellectual force which sustains us in this flame-lit world. So now speaking with Hortensia's name upon my lips, and in tranquil anticipation of the supreme shadow, I doubt not you will believe my words.

Two months ago I sent you my despairing announcement of Hortensia's death. She had so tortured herself between apprehension of what might befall, and distress at what had happened, that her mind became a web of fevered anxiety from the midst whereof she murmured me again and again—I pray that I may die . . . that I may die.

As to her fears, how often had I put for her the facts in measured line. You and I know that Comazon was murdered by the fishermen. As to me, Gehasi will tell you I divided that afternoon between eating a roasted kid, and playing by myself a racing game with the two little ivory chariots I bought in Rome. Now on the day preceding, it was told the fishermen that the money-lender had been repaid two small loans and a morsel of back rent upon his Panormos estate. Gehasi is ready to swear that the day before his death it was town talk at Vicus that Comazon received fifty pieces of gold. But death wipes a clean slate, and his money gettings vanished, as the four fishermen know. When Sisibius landed him at the point, he deliberately sent him to his death, and with the commission of the crime Comazon's purse of gold disappeared. The fishermen's hymn to Apollo was a blasphemous jest—they meant that from such golden dust as those shining pieces were the Immortals made and nourished. Beneath such songs is often an equivocal undertone, as it were to the physical ear a subdued sound of the distant clashing of shields. It was some such undertone—some demoniac song within the song—that Sisibius heard day and night in frantic repetition, till he went gibbering mad and died.

Now, as to the mystery of Hortensia's ending, with whom was she in spiritual

"Sometimes, sitting in the Atrium, I remember Quintilian's boast that while the world lasts the voice of Rome shall still ring down the generations."

converse throughout those visions that plagued her last years, till, from one hallucination to another, the ghastly phantoms she created rose and smote her, as Gehasi saith, to the heart?

It is he who of these things tells me somewhat beyond my own knowledge. Several mornings she paused to talk with him in the garden, questioning upon his boyhood, in that distant Hebrew land of fire, upon his fighting days when I dragged him from a burning house at Zebulon, mistaking him for my Roman servant who lay dead in its ruins, asking of his mother, the woman with long white hair, and ever returning to the meaning and power and association of the words he had graven above his pallet bed:

Thy sins, which were many, are forgiven.

Can I doubt that something secret, of vast and profound import, had revealed itself to her? Looking into the grey eyes I loved, I beheld in those days that they were dim—as though they had seen their dearest illusion fade and some terrible reality awake. Walking with me one day, tremulously smiling, yet with an air withdrawn as one who meditates upon predestined things, she said: "When springtime comes I shall be strong and glad," but before spring drew near came that death for which she prayed. Gazing in her delirium across the soft density of distance into some rare and odorous space whereof she murmured, she beheld Laetus, and imagined she was being allured by the enticement of our child. From before her faded away all earthly things, and in their place opened a transfigured enchantment with the darling face in the midst. My heart stands still when I think upon that miracle of love. What wonder if before that presence she whispered me over and over—I pray that I may die!

It was Gehasi that, with white quivering face askew, called me from my sleep. "Come quickly, master," he cried, "if, *talitha cumi!* it still be time. For an hour hath she sat in the garden, as it were her own statue watching the dawn-lit sky, till of a sudden I perceived that her face drooped, and that she moved no more."

I came at a stride, and found her sitting, as Gehasi said, amid the laurel and acanthus, as it were her own statue, listening to a dear voice that calls—a voice inaudible to others. What was it she beheld or heard in that last hour of earth on the skyline beyond the makers of rainbow and mist? Behind the ripple of the waves was a faint vibrating sound like the throb that lingers when a harp-string breaks. "Can you doubt, dear master," exclaimed Gehasi, seizing my hand, "that she beheld again her dead child, and that her heart, like the bush before the prophet, leaped into flame?" He was right. She had listened to the summons of that irresistible persuasion, which those familiar with curious arts tell us links the living with the dead. If this were suicide, and if suicide be sin, may we not believe that the gods, who have themselves known and weighed human attachments, will judge very mercifully a mother who thus loosens her hold upon earthly things? Hath she gone to a sleep from which no cock crow awakens, or hereafter shall I find her again?

Then the women came, and amid many voices a coverlet was brought, and upon it I laid her. And it was the sunrise of a beautiful day, and I knew that she had passed into the light.

Wherefore now, although she rests far from here in the shade, it gladdens me that the light which was in her beautiful eyes is still for me the light of radiant mornings in her garden. Haveto.

. . . . . .

Inanimate objects acquire interest according as they are associated with human emotion. Some memory of heroism or love, the idyllic presence of a passionate romance, the wraith of an infinite unhappiness—these lend to the things of earth a divine significance. What were the mound of Troy without

"Despite all mutilation the headless and handless statue preserves the shapely symmetry of its pagan day."

its Iliad, or Olympus bereft of the footprints of the Immortals? And whoever visits that renowned Temple of Isis at Pompeii, of whose rites Dexter Quintilian disapproved, will wonder what may have been those mysteries which have made it famous?

Upon the painted walls that knew Florus and Hortensia still float Poseidon and Lyra and Antiope. The very stones seem imprint with the tragical intensity of the story they have told. Their writing has veiled them in the imperishable bloom of that Roman day. From the Silent River they speak to us of the things which were their life. Almost we feel again those vanished emotions, and where they walked remains the footprint of a brooding presence.

In Hortensia's garden linger many day-dreams of that forceful age. Its tiny span thrills with imperishable memories. To its peristyle has been restored the glory of those cascades of roses whereof Dexter Quintilian speaks. Its parterre is bright with the heliotrope and iris and anemone the ancients knew. Violets and verbena and honeysuckle and sunflowers are in profusion, so that the air is fragrant with the odours of that century. Sometimes sitting in the atrium, turning, in the purple-dusted twilight, some classic page, I remember Quintilian's boast that while the world lasts the voice of Rome shall still ring down the generations . . . and how dull must be the ear that never listens to its call!

Beneath some fallen *débris* lay a headless and handless female statue. Despite all mutilation, it preserves the shapely symmetry of its pagan day. It is a seated figure, wrought in fine marble, and has the appearance of first century work. The injuries were probably inflicted by early Christians, who in their iconoclastic zeal broke everything suspected of resembling gods and goddesses, and who, perhaps, set fire to the villa. Shattered though it be, the fragment possesses an exquisite repose, and the same serene beauty that delights us in the seated figure of Agrippina.

The thought suggests itself that Florus, spending here the final span of life, may have had this sculptured portrait of Hortensia placed in her garden in that attitude he describes, when against "the dawn-lit sky" she looked her last on earth.